

## Mark 4:35-41

...and our topic today – fear! Just watch the news and you’ll see lots of fearmongering! We have two very familiar stories today David and Goliath and Jesus calming the storm - Both stories dealing at their core about trust and fear. I think as a parent many times our children look to us to abate their fears...they trust that we will be there for them. In today’s readings what happens when we have very real doubts and fears to deal with?

Now he was clearly in over his head. What he had envisioned for his life was crumbling before him. He knew how to play the game. He surrounded himself with strong people. He planned for every challenge he could anticipate. He played to the crowds. He was everything the people wanted in a leader. He strove to be a victor for himself and his people Israel. But everyone has a weakness. And Saul’s weakness was his pride. His high regard for himself and his own self-reliance.

In that moment the future looked bleak for Isreal’s’ first King...Saul...the impossible threat of their champion Goliath and the battle hardened Philistines on one hand and the failing leadership of their King on the other. The chaos, the fear and the anxiety were all overwhelming. Fear and seemingly impossible situations can also burden us ALL each and every day of our lives don’t they?

Unemployment, paying the bills, putting food on the table, Homelessness, fear for the marginalized, National divisions, Illnesses... cancer and Pandemics...and what’s going to be next? Broken relationships, strained marriages, family dysfunction. Bullying and Gun violence at our schools...The list goes on and on and on...  
How do we even begin to slay these giants? Sometimes it seems like we are all alone in facing our Goliaths...tossed about in storms we have no control over!

Challenges can be so daunting that we can easily become faint of heart. And Where is God in all this...especially when I need him right now?!

We might feel just like those disciples in that boat. Terrified of the storm, only to find Jesus asleep! Really!? The very visceral response of Jesus' terrified disciples reflects our own doubts as Christians, and as the church itself...and where's God...sleeping! Is God sleeping in today?!

We are afraid of the wind and waves that assail our fragile vessels - our lives, our families, our churches, our cities, our nations, and the world. All fleeting – And all so very temporary and fragile!

We fear a lot don't we!? How, as disciples, can we have faith in God? Soooo how's everyone feeling about things right now?

You know I find it interesting that in Hebrew there is no such word for faith...no need for it! They all knew without a doubt that gods existed! The word relates to trusting! Ahhhh that's the question, isn't it? Can we really trust this God?

And isn't Trust the basis for ALL of our relationships? So how do we trust God with all the things that are going on in the world? How do we face the things that can stop us DEAD in our tracks?

The Giants, the storms, and the fragile vessels which carry us on our life's journey? The perils we face... our profound vulnerability... and our longing for someone or something to come in and fix things and make them all better.

For any of this to make ANY sense we must first begin to see that God's ways are not our ways! God works situations out entirely different than we would imagine.

As Israel faced their giant, God chose an unlikely person: one who was despised by his brothers; one who would not have won a popularity contest much less a birthright. God chose in that moment the one who appeared the weakest! God chose someone who trusted in God's strength – not in the strength of their own power and pride.

David didn't play the game the way Saul did. David didn't buy into Saul's worldview. He didn't hide behind a thousand men or Saul's bronze armor to protect him...David just simply trusted God!

The text says David only needed a few things to face Goliath: his staff, 5 smooth stones, his sling, and his shepherd's bag. David perceived strength and courage in what the world would have viewed as weak and insignificant.

David stood up to the chaos around him in order to bring God's triumph and peace to his people. ...and he did it with a small smooth stone. (Hold up one of the stones...)

Let's talk about stones for a minute: Stones are very significant in Scripture. The Bible uses the word "stone" 192 times and it is mentioned within 177 verses.

Stones were often markers of God's presence and action, helping God's people to remember what God had done in their lives! Sort of like monuments today...when something significant happened in the ancient world a standing stone was erected in that place to remember. And God had been calling Israel to be living standing stones to show the world that God was right there with them.

...and here this lowly shepherd boy reaches for a smooth stone to remember and to know that God was with him – and that he was not standing against all the chaos and evil in the world alone - but rather God was right there too.

How are WE called to be standing stones - reminders of God working in and through our lives? Do others see in us the love of Jesus being poured out into the world amidst our fears and turmoil?

Do we witness how God has worked in our lives...sometimes as large as a monument... sometimes as small as a pebble. But no matter how big or small – the one constant is that God is there with us.

As a student in an Education for Ministry program we would do our spiritual autobiographies - the idea was to look back at our lives and look for clues of God's hand at work. It was astounding at how I got here today...and most of it was when times were rough - amidst my own storms and giants...although if you asked me then where was God...I would have told you he certainly must be asleep in the boat.

But without those very real challenges I would never have grown...would never had found the deaconate...or the priesthood...Heck my son Alex would never have been born...ahhhh to look back and look for traces of God in our stories...and then to share them with others - to become living stone - showing others that God is not so very far, far, away...but acting in the world in ways we can only imagine.

Now back in the boat - Jesus', David's descendant by the way, sees no such trust from His own disciples. These guys can't pull themselves together. And Jesus calms both His disciples and the storm. They have yet to recognize that they did not face their storms alone... but rather that God was right there with them.

Notice that Jesus doesn't tell them there is nothing to be afraid of. He instead asks them - Why are you afraid? Why don't you trust me?

It's interesting that the scriptures time and time again say do not be afraid, which is not to say that there are not true things to fear in the world...but rather that God chooses to tell His children - as a parent would whisper into the frightened ear of their child that I am right here with you through it all...

Now sometimes God DOES choose to calm the storm, but most times what really is happening is that God calms His child... and the relationship is that much stronger for it.

You see every child figures out sooner or later that some of the things that frighten us are not real and other things well are very, very real! But by trusting God we come to know peace - and even though there are real things to fear, they need not paralyze us, they need not have dominion over our lives; they need not own us!...because we are not alone in this boat... are we?

Fearsome things ARE in this world and in our lives each and every day...but they don't have the last word. A stone...feel how solid it is...feel how smooth it is...is it real?

I tell you - God is more real than this stone...if you are here today going through some hardship...if you are plagued by doubts and fears...maybe carry a small stone in your pocket and rub it whenever you wish to remind yourself that God is real...God is here! Or place it somewhere you can see it - anything to remind you (especially when you need it most) that God is, in fact, with you!

Let's end today by looking at God's story... the big picture...At its heart the Bible is a love story between God and God's people...a parent and their children...and like all love stories it is rooted in trust!

In the beginning was the word and the word was *with* God, and the word was God... he was in the beginning *with* God... That's how John begins his Gospel... reminding us that before there was anything... God existed eternally in community *with* God-self... we call this idea - trinity!

In Genesis God speaks the world into existence: He creates a man and a woman and a garden, and there He walks *with* them.

Then God befriends a man named Abraham and He promises that He would be *with* him, creating a nation that would be God's very own. Then God talks to Moses and sends him to free his people, and Moses says who am I Lord that I should do this and God replies "you will go because I will be *with* you. Then on to Joshua, and David this morning...

Then we see God speaking through the prophets, delivering God's message of reassurance to all those in relationship with God - do not be afraid because I am *with* you.

You see this over, and over, and over again! God seeks evermore to be *with* God's people even in the midst of their turmoil and pain and fear!

Then we come to the birth of Jesus, Emmanuel means God with us! And Jesus ate *with* us, He wept *with* us, and He suffered *with* us. And as Jesus is hanging upon a cross He assures the penitent thief that today He would be *with* him in paradise. And at the end of Matthew's Gospel Jesus upon returning to heaven assures His very frightened students that He will be *with* them... always.

**WITH**... a simple preposition; but one that occurs over 6,000 times throughout the Bible... capturing the essence of our Christian story. It captures the center of our faith... where our trust is... that we serve and worship a God that from the very beginning of time, has ever sought to simply be *with* us.

Unfortunately, we sometimes exchange that word “With”, with some other preposition that we stick in there... some seek to get others to live UNDER God, under authority and rules. And we see the problems that can cause.

Others think our primary posture should be living our life FOR God (eg clergy). To do things for Him and to carry out His mission here on earth. In some circles its life FROM God. And in some cases, it’s even life WITHOUT God.

In all of this we forget that the calling of our Christian life from the beginning to the end is simply to Live Life WITH God! Live Life WITH God! This shift in perspective profoundly changes how we come to see God!

It changes the way we come to see our own circumstances. That is: your pain, your suffering, your hurt, your fears, your circumstances – bad... or even good - cease to define who you are!

So whether you are facing a giant, a storm, or are in a place of suffering or brokenness or paralyzed by fear...the most important thing is... that however and wherever you are... you will never be alone...right there in the midst of it all God is right there **WITH** you.

It doesn’t mean we don’t try and change the world for the better, or to change our own circumstances, but don’t fall into the trap that in order to live our lives more fully that we must somehow change our circumstances to do so.

So may you come to know that sometimes God DOES calm the storms...but if you let Him... God will ALWAYS calm you... His child.

...and may you know that to Jesus’ disciples (that’s you guys) God is WITH you...Always...through it ALL Good or Bad – God is WITH YOU!  
...Always!

Your faithful servant,  
carmen