

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

1 Samuel 17:32-49

³² David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." ³³ Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth." ³⁴ But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵ I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. ³⁶ Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God." ³⁷ David said, "The LORD, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine." So Saul said to David, "Go, and may the LORD be with you!" ³⁸ Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. ³⁹ David strapped Saul's sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them." So David removed them. ⁴⁰ Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine. ⁴¹ The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. ⁴² When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. ⁴³ The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ⁴⁴ The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field." ⁴⁵ But David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶ This very day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, ⁴⁷ and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's and he will give you into our hand." ⁴⁸ When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. ⁴⁹ David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

Commentary

The story of David and Goliath begins the adult drama of David's rise to power in Israel. David appeared at a time of crisis for Israel. The Philistines, coastal neighbors to the west had massed an army on Israel's border about fourteen miles west of Bethlehem. Among the men of the Philistine army was a giant warrior named Goliath who had taunted Israel for forty days. King Saul, whose earlier victories against various enemies had earned him great praise, had since lost God's favor and could not break the military impasse. Goliath was a hardened warrior, heavily armored. David was just a boy who could not bear the weight of regular armor, and went out to fight Goliath with nothing but a sling and five stones. But David also invoked the name of "the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel." Thus, this battle wasn't really about David and Goliath; rather it was a battle between the God of Israel and the gods of the Philistines. The point made by the storyteller is that soldiers are not saved by sword and spear, but by the power of God alone. The immediate consequence of the battle is David's victory, the beheading of Goliath and the slaughter of the Philistines. The theological purpose of David's victory is "that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel." This passage is part of a history that legitimizes David's rise to kingship in Israel. David, the underdog, the insignificant youngest son of a farmer and shepherd, was immensely popular with the people, who identified with his marginal status and admired his many talents.

Reflection

Christians today may wonder in light of so many atrocities in modern times whether God condones war and military conquest, whatever the cause. There are many similar passages in Scripture that appear to sanction war and violence. How do we reconcile this sanctioning of violence with the message brought by the Prince of Peace?

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ² For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! ³ We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴ but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷ truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see-- we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything. ¹¹ We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. ¹² There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. ¹³ In return-- I speak as to children-- open wide your hearts also.

Commentary

In this passage, Paul appeals to the Corinthians to trust him and accept his leadership, declaring all the things he has done for them: suffering for them, boasting about them, and renouncing their material support. He wants them to return his affections and be reconciled to God. Paul's opponents, Jewish Christians who insisted that all Christians must be circumcised and follow Mosaic law, have undermined Paul's teaching and swayed hearts away from him. Paul fights back with all the persuasion he can muster. He evokes a sense of urgency in verse 2 with a quote from Isaiah 49:8, and adding: "Now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation." Paul lists nine different kinds of suffering he has endured on behalf of the church in Corinth. He also links the endurance of suffering with a virtuous life, saying that he and his fellow workers live by purity, patience and kindness. Paul further suggests that appearances are deceiving; though treated as "impostors," he and his co-workers are "true." The paradoxes he mentions in verses 8-10 contrast outward appearance with true inward reality, a theme we've seen in previous readings. The mature Christian responds to tribulations with spiritual grace that defies the world's wisdom. That Paul lived through all these tribulations and paradoxes with such grace makes his argument more compelling.

Reflection

The way we live, the way we speak about and treat one another reflects on the gospel we claim to believe. When church members speak poorly of one another, what does that say about our faith?

Though Paul links endurance of suffering with a virtuous life, clearly not all suffering is. Why would some suffering be virtuous and some not?

Mark 4:35-41

³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."

³⁶ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷ A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" ³⁹ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Commentary

The early part of Mark's Gospel relates the in-breaking of God's reign in the life and actions of Jesus. In the unfolding of the story in this passage, the reader begins to get a sense of what it

means that “the kingdom of God has come near.” The story confronts us with the astounding event of the stilling of the winds and sea. The event is so remarkable that it is easy to get caught up in the interesting but not very fruitful question of whether, and how, Jesus did it. Better to concentrate on the meaning of the story in its context. The sea symbolizes throughout the Old Testament the abode of chaos. Thus, when Jesus calms the storm it is not merely a brute demonstration of power over nature, but a redemptive act in which the chaotic forces of the sea, like the demons, are “rebuked” (Mark 4:39). The miracle has a purpose in the rescue of disciples from fear and disorder. The narrator wants us to know that the storm was frightful. Verse 37 provides a picture of a boat in great distress, already being swamped. The anguish of the disciples, then, was not ill-founded. They were not overreacting when they awakened Jesus with the frantic cry, “Do you not care that we are perishing?” Their situation was desperate, and they turned to the one who brought them on this trip in the first place. Jesus’ sleep is revealing. His own trust in God brings remarkable peace, even in the face of the storm, and contrasts dramatically with the panic of the disciples at the chaos of the sea. Their panic shows that they have not yet reached a point of profound trust. But at least they are asking the right question: “Who is this?” The story recognizes those times in the life of the church when it is threatened by the forces of chaos and confusion, forces that turn out to be no match for the reign of God present in the person of Jesus. The stories present us not merely with the presence of Jesus, who shares our predicament amid the storms of life, but with the power of Jesus, who can do something about the storms. The text confronts us not so much with a strategy for coping, as with a promise of salvation.

Reflection

Storms can arise from within a congregation (financial troubles, loss of leadership, etc.) or from an external source (fire, denominational disputes, etc.). What storms has your church weathered? What resources allowed you to face the chaos of the storm and emerge from it? What role did the faith of the church play in the outcome?

Responsive Psalter

From Psalm 9

⁹ The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.

¹⁰ **And those who know your name put their trust in you,
for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.**

¹¹ Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion.
Declare his deeds among the peoples.

¹² For he who avenges blood is mindful of them;
he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

¹³ Be gracious to me, O LORD.
See what I suffer from those who hate me;

**you are the one who lifts me up from the gates of death,
14 so that I may recount all your praises,
and, in the gates of daughter Zion,
rejoice in your deliverance.**

**15 The nations have sunk in the pit that they made;
in the net that they hid has their own foot been caught.**

**16 The LORD has made himself known, he has executed judgment;
the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands.**

**17 The wicked shall depart to Sheol,
all the nations that forget God.**

**18 For the needy shall not always be forgotten,
nor the hope of the poor perish forever.**

**19 Rise up, O LORD! Do not let mortals prevail;
let the nations be judged before you.**

**20 Put them in fear, O LORD;
let the nations know that they are only human.**

Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that
what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**