

Preached by Carl Rush
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church
Alexandria, VA
June 21, 2009

Mark 4: 35–41
I Samuel 17: 17, 26, 31, 39–45, 49

SENT BY A LOVING FATHER

This could well be the most famous story from the Old Testament. It could be one of the first that we teach our children well. And the story today has been included in the history of Israel and the life of the church for the same reasons we like it. This is a tangible experience of trusting God when life is overwhelming.

Jesus expresses this same power when He calms the storms in the story from Mark. It's easy for us to make the connection between the storms of life and the struggles we face and how only God's spirit can take charge of our hearts and calm us when we are confused.

I have just returned from a few days sailing on the Chesapeake. I had already prepared for this Sunday. This was a time that I had looked forward to for some months now, planned well in advance. If you've been watching the weather, you know that the Chesapeake has been violent for the past two and a half days. It's been frightening.

I was accompanied on this trip by a charming national musician and I commend to you his Buddy Holly type of organization of three part harmony: three musicians creating a band. "One Flew South" is the name you want to Google when you go home. This professional and up-and-coming musician was there with us at night on the boat playing his guitar. And I thought about David calming Saul's fears at other times and places.

There was also a powerful Washington attorney on the boat. It was a new boat that had not had its maiden voyage yet. There also was a high ranking church official and another Presbyterian minister—five of us all together. Some of these people you know well, so their names are left out to protect the innocent. We were there for a shake down cruise to find out what worked and what didn't on a new sailing vessel. Great fun and some great challenges.

We debated theology until the wee hours of the morning every night. We challenged one another's judgment when the storms hit. There were four different systems that passed over the Chesapeake the past two and a half days. And there were at least five opinions about how to handle their challenges.

Saul is going through a difficult time in his leadership of Israel. He's been able to protect the settlements that were encroaching on Philistine territory up until now. But now this giant of a challenge comes to him. Remember how the story goes: Goliath comes out and says "Let us not all fight; just send one to fight with me and that will decide the battle." And Saul and all of his army were terrified. And the insults began to fly.

No wonder Saul doubts David. In essence, he has the same spirit at that moment as Goliath—might will make right. Remember what he said to David when David comes to him first: “You are but a boy.” He sounds like Goliath when he first sees David come forward. “He was disdained for he was a youth.” Then David and Goliath, both being men, or at least males, did their own share of insulting one another. We know the conflict. It’s about resisting evil and trusting in the power of God to work in us.

One night during the theological debates, the well known attorney lamented his Presbyterian church’s circumstances. “It seems that we’re being taught that somehow faith is about an individual expression of God and the gospel and us.” And he lamented, “I always thought it was about community.” His church had a new pastor, hadn’t even been there a year. We all know how that feels—lots of adjusting, lots of questioning. What’s the message? What’s the vision? Where are we going to go with this seemingly new message?

I’ll tell you a secret. This new sail boat was equipped with the finest electronics—state of the art. Things I had never seen before. And they almost killed us. Because when the storm comes—as four of them did—you need to not be looking down. You need to be looking out on the horizon. You need to be able at that point to sail without electronics. Trusting what you know to be true about your own ability and the strength of the vessel in which you are sailing. I spent very little time behind the wheel, but I knew when we were flying, so to speak, by electronics. We always veered off to port about 40 degrees no matter where the wind was coming from, because everybody was looking down at the screen of the electronics and nobody was steering the boat.

Remember David. How he never took his eye off the ball. He came there and he saw all this fear and he said, “But we’re the army of the living God who has always delivered us.” Remember the background of the story. This may never have taken place—this defeat of Goliath—if David’s father hadn’t sent him to check on his three older brothers. “Take to them this bread and cheese and bring me some token of good news, of their well-being.”

We teach our children this story, but it’s not really supposed to be about David being the secret weapon of Israel. It’s not even the story of small overcoming big. It isn’t the story of weak over strong or the under dog defeating the alpha. This is the story of God using a person of faith to overcome great obstacles. This is about God looking down the road and seeing; indeed, it could be the end of Israel’s trust in His covenant promise to them. This is about God’s plan and God’s vision for God’s people. And it starts with a loving father sending David to King Saul’s battlefield—Philistine. And Jessie is God’s instrument as much as David is. He did not know it, but there was no one in that encampment willing to step up.

Isn’t it true today? There’s never a shortage of spectators on the sideline when life’s circumstances are overwhelming. God could have used one of David’s brothers for the work of slaying Goliath. He could have used any of the Hebrew soldiers in that encampment, except none of them were willing to show up.

God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary ministries. And that is part of what I want you to hear this morning. Right now, as I invite Steve Trickey to come forward on behalf of the Building Committee to tell you about a collection of people that God is using and wants to use to fulfill God's plans for all of us.

Amen.