

## **Fee, Fie, Foe, Fum...**

[Texts - I Samuel 17; Mark 4:35-41]

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June 21, 2015

This morning's Scripture readings raise the issue of facing our greatest fears and challenges, and overcoming them. In our Old Testament reading, the armies of Israel are literally confronted with a *giant* challenge! Goliath of Gath, the Timofey Mozgov of the Philistine army, has paralyzed the Israelites with fear. His sheer size and his thunderous taunting terrifies even the bravest of the Israeli soldiers. There's no one among them willing to confront this massive and menacing foe. That is, until the young shepherd, David, arrives on the scene. David is able to look beyond the threatening appearance of this massive warrior, and boldly stand-up for what he believes is good and right and honorable.

The story of David and Goliath epitomizes the willingness of the little person to take-on the giant - whether it be the big bad bully on the playground, the bullying bureaucracy of big government, or that corrupt corporate CEO who thinks he and his company are "too big to fail." David's Goliath actually is a giant of a man. He's the ferocious champion of the Philistines - a large confederation of nomadic warriors, who left a wide path of destruction from Egypt through Syria in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E.. Goliath is big, strong and battle-hardened - capable of killing with sword or spear, or even his bare hands. David, on the other hand, has absolutely no war experience; but he does have a couple key advantages.

As a shepherd, David is used to standing-up to protect the weak and frightened, against fierce and intimidating predators. He also realizes that he will need to depend on a power greater than his own, in order to succeed. Fortunately, David's formative years have been spent in the great outdoors - allowing him to reflect, night-and-day, upon the amazing vastness of Creation and on the awesome greatness of the Creator. This helps David develop an inner serenity and strength, which will serve him well in this perilous and pivotal moment. With a

remarkable confidence and composure, and a steady hand, David hits his towering target right between the eyes! And [as the old camp song says] "...the giant came tumbling down, down, down, down, down, SPLAT!

In this morning's New Testament reading, Jesus also demonstrates an amazing serenity and strength, in the midst of a dangerous and life threatening situation. He and his disciples are in a boat, crossing the Sea of Galilee. The trip starts out smoothly, but suddenly a horrendous storm hits, and giant waves begin to fill the boat, threatening to sink it. When the disciples look for Jesus, they find that he's in the back of the boat, sleeping peacefully on a cushion. So they shake him, and wake him, and try to convey to him their own sense of panic and fear. "Teacher, don't you care that we're perishing?" They're afraid - rightly afraid - of the destructive power of the roaring wind and the raging sea. And they hope that Jesus can do something about it; which he does.

Jesus wakes-up, rebukes the wind, and says to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceases, and "there is a great calm...." Now, there may have been a "great calm" upon the water; but within those disciples there arises a new and different fear. That storm was certainly scary; but to be in the same boat with this amazingly powerful person, suddenly seems equally alarming. They ask one another, "Who *is* this person, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" They're beginning to recognize that Jesus must have a tremendously powerful connection to God *Almighty* - and as they've been taught, God is definitely One to be feared! Yet Jesus is able to address both areas of their fear. He speaks words of calm and peace to the wind and waves; and then he speaks similar words of calm and peace to his frightened friends. "Why are you afraid?" Jesus asks, "Have you still no faith?"

In this story, like in our first, *faith* is a crucial factor in conquering fear; but it's important to clarify what the word "faith" actually means. The *faith* of which Jesus speaks, isn't the kind of "faith" where you must blindly close your eyes to the world around you, and reject the realities of historical, societal, or scientific insights. Genuine faith doesn't require that people try to make themselves believe things that are really hard to believe! That's not faith, that's merely mental manipulation. According to Jesus, *faith* simply means that you and I *trust* in the ultimate goodness, protection, and care of our Divine, Source. And we can do this, Jesus says, because the Holy One truly is trust-*worthy*! In sharp contrast to the fear-filled message of many religious leaders, Jesus proclaims that God isn't out to get us! Instead, the Holy One who gives us life, really does love us and compassionately cares about all of our lives. And the more you and I learn to trust that love, and to put our faith in that remarkable Good News, the more we will find a genuine sense of peace, confidence and well-being growing within us.

Throughout our lives, storms *will* rage around us, or within us; and giant, overwhelming problems will arise which threaten our safety and security. Fear is a natural reaction to those menacing circumstances. However, Jesus comes to remind us, that whatever happens in Life, Our Divine Source is for us, with us, and within us. And the Holy One's desire, isn't to fill us with fear; but to replace our fears with faith and confidence, wholeness and peace. Or as it says in I John 4:18, "Perfect love casts out all fear!"

You and I never know, from day to day, what Life will bring our way. Sometimes we seem to just cruise along with the gentle wind at our backs. Then suddenly, things drastically change, and we feel battered and beaten and ready to sink into the darkness of despair. Family problems arise, financial stress knocks us for a loop, serious illness strikes, and our own frailty and mortality smacks us right between the eyes like a stone from a slingshot. In every one of these situations, the crucial thing for you and me to remember, is that even though Life's circumstances and conditions *will* change, the reality of Divine Love and Grace will always remain constant and sure. And those wonderful

words that Jesus speaks to that ferocious storm, and to his frightened friends, continue to ring-true today: “Peace, be still...Do not be afraid!”