

Sermon

Sunday 25th June, 2006

Lessons 1 Samuel 17: 32 – 54 2 Corinthians 6: 1 – 13 Mark 4: 35 – 41

Prayer of Illumination

O LORD, be a mouth and wisdom to all who preach Your Word. Uphold them that they may uplift You. And give to Your people the hearing ear, and the understanding heart; that they may know You to be the Way, and the Truth and the Life; O Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Jesus arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, 'Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said [to his disciples,] 'Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?'

Mark 4: 39 – 40

Trust, said Leslie Weatherhead, is 'an inner reliance of the soul on God.' Let us picture what we mean by trust. A fourteen year old schoolboy has a marvellous opportunity of a camping holiday in the Rocky mountains with his father. His father is a good 'chum' to the boy and an experienced climber. Imagine the boy's excitement: the gathering of the kit, the setting out, the first camp, the adventure of it! They will climb the peaks together. They may see a bear or two. The young boy has been taught much. He knows how to get a fire going, how to put up a tent and it is easy to imagine the young boy resting each night under the stars, tending to his aching feet and full of excitement. What a wonderful holiday! But it would not be so, if he were alone. He would be lonely and what if he broke an ankle? Suppose he met a bear alone; suppose he got lost. Because his father was with him he had courage and peace of mind, he was with someone who 'knew the ropes', who was used to the mountains, one for whom no happening would be a surprise and one who knew the road home. Weatherhead said that trust is 'an inner reliance of the soul on God.' In life we learn many lessons and sometimes those lessons are learned through 'frustration and failure and tears,' but can we learn to live each day mindful of One

who journeys with us, who ‘knows the ropes’, One for whom no happening would be a surprise and One who knows the road home and can take us there? Can we learn that lesson?¹

The story of David and Goliath is one of the greatest stories of all time. The young boy, David, volunteers to defeat in battle the mighty Goliath. David is dismissively described as being ‘but a youth,’ whereas Goliath is a ‘man of war.’ When Goliath comes face to face with the young man, he taunts David: ‘Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field.’ David stands before Goliath without armour, no brass helmet and no coat of bronze, while Goliath towers over him with sword and spear and shield. In the story, there is no theological comment surrounding the verses in which David kills Goliath. We would want to be careful not to rush to the conclusion in any battle or war that God was partisan. What is of crucial importance in this greatest of stories is not the killing of Goliath but the faith of David. David is able to say to Saul, ‘I have faced great dangers before and God has been with me through them.’ Saul sends David out with the words, ‘Go, and the LORD be with thee.’ Goliath throws taunts at the boy, while David replies with a statement of faith, ‘I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts.’ Two weeks ago I spoke with a Fijian man, six foot six and very broad, who had not long returned from Iraq on his second tour of duty with The Royal Scots. I said to him that it must be quite terrifying out there. Towering over me, and smiling benignly as though I were a child, he raised his right hand to the sky and said, ‘I go with Jesus.’ Here was a giant of a man who found his faith, his Bible and his prayers, to be more powerful than the gun he carried. Not for a moment did the Fijian soldier mean that God was partisan, but that he knew in his heart and soul that in all the life-threatening dangers

¹ Weatherhead, Leslie D *That Immortal Sea* p63f

he could face, Jesus would be with him. David said to Goliath, 'I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts.' Trust is an 'inner reliance of the soul on God.' It is the knowledge that there is One beside us who knows the ropes, One for whom no happening would be a surprise, and One who knows our way home and can take us there.

In our Gospel lesson Jesus rebukes his disciples for their lack of faith. Their boat is caught in a storm and it looks as though they are about to die. In panic and almost screaming, they wake Jesus with the words, 'Do you not care?' These are words that many people feel that they have cause to utter at different times in their lives: 'Do you not care?' But, here in the boat, Jesus calms the wind and the sea, saying to the disciples, 'Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?' These seem harsh words but the English translation obscures the meaning. The disciples are not merely afraid. They are 'afraid beyond limit.' Their fear is excessive and it knocks their faith clean out of their hearts and minds. Calvin said, 'Fear is not to be opposed. Those who are not touched [in this life] with a sense of fear are more stupid than firm.' Fear, he said, can itself arouse faith. Nervousness is not a proof of the failure of faith. We should not assume that David faced Goliath without fear, without his palms sweating and his tongue dry. Not for a moment should we presume that the Fijian soldier or any other soldier for that matter can face the battlefield without fear. Jesus' rebuke to his disciples is not for their fear, but for them being afraid beyond limit. Trust is an 'inner reliance of the soul on God' in all circumstances, even though nervousness be present. Trust is that sense that wherever we go, we go with Jesus.

Our faith is a Resurrection faith: Jesus of Nazareth died, was raised from the dead and mysteriously dwells in the heart of God. An old elder of the Kirk faced a traumatic experience late in life and his wife was tragically killed. A counsellor was sent by the Social Work Department to help the man in his bereavement. The conversation began gently. Then the counsellor, speaking about death, asked the elder, 'What do you believe?' Nervous and fearful for the future he may have been and devastated as his present circumstances were, he looked the counsellor straight in the eye and said:

I believe in God the Father almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord.....

The elder went on to recite the entire Apostles' Creed. The counsellor promptly left and never returned. Fear, though not fear beyond limit, and nervousness are part of life. In no sense are they a proof of the failure of faith. One of the most moving scenes in English literature comes at the end of Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. The carts are rumbling through the thronged streets of Paris to the guillotine. In one of them there are two prisoners: a man who has lost his soul but has found it again, and who is now giving his life for a friend; and beside him a girl in teenage years. She had seen him in prison and observed his gentleness and courage. 'If I may ride with you, 'she asks him, thinking of that last dread journey, 'will you let me hold your hand? I am afraid and it will give me courage.' So when they ride together her hand is in his; and even when they reach the execution there is no fear beyond limit in her. She looks at the quiet, composed face of the man beside her and says, 'I think you were sent to me by heaven.' The Christian faith never, not ever, protects us from the hardships and evils of this world but what we can do is speak of a 'reinforcing presence'²: One who is beside us, who knows the ropes and who is sent to us by

² Stewart, James S [Walking with God](#) p124

heaven. Christ's companionship makes every experience and every dark experience sacramental: yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear beyond limit, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me and thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.'

There was a hymn of many years ago which was sung to a Sankey tune. The first line was Simply trusting every day. Trust is an inner reliance of the soul on God. Through nervousness and ordinary fear, the Christian can say, 'I go with Jesus.' Jesus is sent to us by heaven, a sacramental presence every day. And the point of the Goliath story and the point of Jesus' rebuke to his disciples is for us to know in hearts that whatever dangers we face in life the LORD of hosts is with us.

Amen.