

St Columba: 12th Ordinary Sunday 2009

1 Samuel 17:32-49

Mark 4:35 - 41

'Peace, Be Still': in the face of fear

Over the past few weeks there has been the unfolding of a story that began a while ago with the attempted exorcism of evil spirits from a young woman on account of her sisters unacceptable behaviour. The young woman died and the relatives who attempted to lift what they called the 'makatu' by pouring water down her throat and in her eyes were, found to be either guilty of murder, or accomplices to the murder. It was a very sad case.

The Gospel reading from Mark tells o story of exorcism too. Jesus is rebuking the elements of disquiet and fear. "Peace, be still" he tells them. These are words Jesus uses in other places in the Gospels too in the face of what the various writers name as 'demons'. In the face of the fear of 'perishing' Jesus calls on peace and stillness and so overcomes their fear; stills the wind and calms the sea quietyens the storm that threatens to overwhelm them.

Mark is identifying for the early church, the power of God that resources Jesus. He is indicating to his hearers

where this power is to be found and where their power and resilience is too. It takes discipline and courage to be still and seek peace in the face of fear; in the face of our monsters and demons - it takes practice to be still.

The story from the First Testament, the story of David and Goliath – such a familiar story – often told to underline how the small and powerless can be victorious over the mighty.

But I invite you to think for a minute of that young man David... how scared he must have been inside, when striding out in front of the army and the might Goliath he must have been shaking in his shoes so to speak...no matter his words of bravado.

Like most adolescent young men he was never going to admit his fear...or that he couldn't do the job!
But also,

like many young men he took his responsibilities very seriously, and as a shepherd had clearly spent hours practising with his sling shot.

If as a young person, you ever tried to use one you will know just how much practice such a weapon requires. And then, to be able to reach the necessary degree of stillness to use it in the face of that fearsome Philistine and his army was no mean accomplishment! He must have practiced and practised to have such confidence that he could draw on this powerful resource –stillness and inner peace. For a young person he had an inner

resilience that enabled him to find stillness in the face of fear.

Historical or metaphorical, the story of David and Goliath has many truths for us to ponder.

All of us face personal demons from time to time. They are found in those things that unsettle us, that disquiet us, that bring fear into our lives. We can't wash them away or wish them away. They are what in times past was felt to be uncontrollable – chaos.

I am prepared to say that all of us have felt this feeling at some time in our lives – this sense of things being out of our control - in chaos! In such times we need inner resilience that we can draw on. Resilience that enables us to withstand being caught in the swirl of emotions that can derail us.

What faith resources us with, in times like this, is confidence that God's spirit of peace is with us - and can be accessed in the face of these demons of disquiet. God's spirit of is present with us even in what seems the darkest and most bereft of times.

Eli Weisel, A Jewish writer, setting down his record after the WWII holocaust tells of a young child hanging on the gallow, his parents and others watching with tears

streaming down their faces - and the question coming from somewhere in the crowd "Where is God now?" And the reply; "In his mother's tears and with all who condemn this act."

God is to be found in our tears of outrage, our tears of despair.

- And in such times it is being able to remember we are not alone
- to stop and find the still place within so we can find reassurance that we are not alone:
- then we can find strength.
- Then we are able to draw on the practice of stillness and quiet to face our fears.

(All Blacks under pressure – well practised moves...)

One of the learnings that I have made in my own life is that the times of chaos and fear that have disquieted me, signal times of change! Even if the change is one I think I can support I can get that sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach that makes me want to return to the security of what I know how to do, or control. I think then, this that which disquiets me will go away!

Saul, in the David and Goliath story, was already on the edge – change was happening - his power as king was waning and Saul was beginning his drift into fear and displacement. Even the defeat of Israel's enemy by the young David would not stop the shift in power that was happening. Later in the story Saul acts out of jealousy

and envy and even attempts to destroy David. (Once his saviour) His loss of dignity and purpose as a leader of the people remind us how vulnerable we are to monsters, demons of our own creation when we lose our sense of purpose and our points of reference. And this is how it frequently is. When change faces us we want control again.

(Auckland SuperCity...)

At the centre of the whirlpool is the still centre, in the midst of seeming chaos it is possible to find the stillness where there is peace and the enabling creative spirit of God; in the midst of the storm we can call up the peace of God and find that core stillness which is strength and courage to face our monsters and demons.

Out of Chaos God brought forth the earth and all that is in it. – Be not afraid.