

SERMON: 2018/06/24 (5th Sunday aft. Pentecost, Yr. B - Track 1) - 1 Samuel 17:1a, 4-11,19-23,32-49 & Mark 4:35-41

[Song: 'What A Mighty God We Serve' - Listener Kids.]

[Invite children to the front.]

I described last week how Jesus with His miracles attracted such a large crowd in Galilee that they had to retreat to the shoreline around the Lake of Tiberias; and to speak to them (without repeating Himself and so that they could all see Him), He got into a boat, which was pushed out towards the middle.

Well, evening (soon) came and it got dark, and a violent 'windstorm arose': the waves were so big that water came "crashing" into the little boat, and the Apostles got very wet.

And even though they had Jesus with them, they began to panic!

They "shouted" at Him [Lk. 8:24], saying, "Help! We're going to die!"

But Jesus wasn't worried.

He knew that bad things can happen even to those (like us) that God loves, but also that we should trust Him and have faith in His promises that there is something worse than death *and better* than life(!), [see: Mt. 10:28; Rev. 21:4].

So, He got up, stretched out His arm and said: "Stop."

And it did.

The storm disappeared.

It obeyed Him, because He was its creator.

Just like in the beginning when God confronted the chaos of the primitive universe without life and brought order and beauty and intelligence, Jesus took control of the weather in Israel. - because *He's* the mighty God we serve.

Let's pray:

.... in Jesus' name, amen.

[Ask children to leave.]

(And the Philistine said, "Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man, that we may fight together." [1 Sam. 17:10])

Previously I've told you that the Philistines - about whom we heard again this morning - were a little like proto-Vikings: they came from the sea in boats and made amphibious raids along the coast of Canaan-Israel; before (later) planting five, well-'fortified' colonies in the south-west. [See: Deut. 2:23; Josh. 13:3 & 2

Kgs. 18:8]

And if they came from the sea, the question is, "Where?", right?

And whilst there's some debate and disagreement about this - as with many things that took place so long ago - an increasing number of scholars suggest that the Philistines were a "Hellenic" people, that is to say, from Greece; and, *specifically*, the island of Crete, (which is, in fact, the prophet Amos' claim in chapter 9 (of his book), [see: v.7]):[n.1]

They were both, after all, a renowned mariner people.

And archaeologists have discerned a 'close stylistic similarity' in the ceramics that they used.[n.2]

And, to an extent, they seemed to have even worshipped the same gods using '[c]ult objects with Aegean connections...'[n.3]

Were they - the "Philistines," then, (desperate) refugees from some terrible calamity like the eruption of a volcano that devastated the "Minoan" civilization?[n.4]

Or merely predatory *pirates* looking for "easy pickings"?

But why does this matter?

Why is it worth mentioning?

Because if the Philistines *were* militant migrants from Greece, this fact explains - and (much) more than that, *verifies* - the David-Goliath episode, which otherwise *may* strike you as a(n unlikely) melodrama: it certainly doesn't seem like a *sensible* way to settle a war, does it?

Single-combat, one champion against another?

For despite the fanciful romance of our movies where often a lone, muscly "maverick" goes-it-alone against an army of goons and wins the day by eliminating a sole villainous mastermind, we know that this isn't the nature of *real* battles, which involve many hundreds if not thousands of soldiers in squads and battalions fighting over weeks, months and even decades [e.g. *Operation Enduring Freedom*]; with victory being secured only by crushing the will of an enemy by a brutal loss of life or the massive destruction of their infrastructure.

The idea, then, that the Philistines, who, we glean from the text, possessed *overwhelming* superiority on the battlefield [see: Ex. 13:17; the Samson narrative in *Judges*, and 1 Sam. 4:1-11], would send forward only an individual infantryman - albeit a gigantic one [1 Sam. 17:4-7] - to decide the outcome on behalf of their

entire 'assembly' [v.47] seems far-fetched; the stuff of fairy-tales and bedtime stories: innocent nonsense for the gullible, yes?

But we have *good* reason to believe that this is, in fact, *exactly* how - on occasion - the (ancient) Greeks approached their warfare:[n.5]
consider Homer's *Iliad*.

(Do you know it? One of the oldest poems in existence.)

Paris, the handsome prince of a city in north-western Turkey called "Troy", woos Helen, said to be the most beautiful woman in the world, away from her husband, one of the Grecian kings.

Cuckolded, jilted and enraged, he then convinces his more powerful brother - and the other nobles - to launch an attack, and the ensuing war lasts ten, *long* years. But it is punctuated at regular intervals by contests of martial skill between (just) pairs of antagonists. Indeed, there is *very* little else! [n.6]

And so, therefore, these David-and-Goliath moments are 'pivotal' for the whole conflict.[n.7]

And whilst this makes for *fantastic* theatre, which is why it has been preserved down to the modern day, '*everything* currently suggests...that [t]his story...is [actually] based on a memory of historical events.'[n.8] - only 'stylised and elevated':[n.9]

And they adopted this peculiar custom, quite simply, 'to save bloodshed' [n.10], which makes a lot of sense when you think about it: in an age before mechanisation and automation, before modern medicine and the massive population growth it has unleashed, at a time of extremely high infant mortality and rampant disease, *manpower* was extremely precious to primitive states, and not something to be gambled.

Your massed ranks of amateur spearmen, then, were held back; *preserved* to farm and mine and lumber another day.

And in their place you sent forward a specialist - probably, an aristocrat - to apply his well-honed talents against another in the hope of winning a *symbolic* victory that both sides then agreed to abide by.

And *this* is what we see happening in our passage from *Samuel*.

Notice, therefore, that our author pauses his account to "drool" over the expensive equipment that Goliath carries, [17:4b-7a].

And the fact that the "giant" has with him a servant to carry his shield, [v.7b].

To the ordinary Israelite, then - who spent much more time in their fields and with sheep than they did sparring (with spear or sword) in the *dojo* or the gymnasium - this *professional* warrior was terrifying:

We find in the *Book of Joshua* and in *Judges* that *their* "methodology" - if you can call it that - of warfare was a(n untrained) mad rush at the opposition followed by

something that would have resembled a bloody barroom brawl (on a large scale).
Very little strategy or forethought.

Thus, to see this solitary, properly equipped, thoroughly practised Philistine [see: v.33] walk out in-between the armies and issue his confident challenge was dreadfully *alien* and *deeply* unnerving, [see: v.4a].

Consequently, they hesitate: [v.11, 16, 24-25].

And fail to recognise the advantageous proposal being offered.

But *not* the young David:

He accepts, [see: v.32-37].

And like his (direct) descendant Jesus would many years later (in Jerusalem), *David*, (in the valley of Elah), risks his life to save many.

And we face giants today.

"What do you mean?", you ask?

Well, there's that massive one, "atheism."

He scares lots of Christians.

And then there's his friend, "progress."

And what about bereavement?

He tends to sneak up and ambush you from behind, but he's just as threatening to the faith of many.

But we've been set a *powerful* example.

And it isn't one of intellectually closing our eyes and making a blind "leap" that to others will seem like nonsense.

David saw clearly what was in front of him, (just as (the vulnerable, (fully) *human*) Christ faced the same scary storm His Apostles did).

And the boy had *no* foreknowledge that he'd win:

He wasn't a prophet - a man of (supernatural) visions.

However, he had *sound* reason to believe in the *reality* and the *goodness* of God.

After all, as a Jew, he was present in the Holy Land only because of a series of miraculous interventions, which had allowed his people, the underdog of underdogs, to succeed in the journey to that place.

And I've offered you this morning (more) *evidence* to believe in the reliability of God's word.

So, let's stand up tall - together - and look squarely at the challenges we face, and say, "Come on! Give it your best shot." [Pause.]

Let's affirm our faith, then, in the [Nicene] Creed.

Footnotes:

1. Singer, Itamar (1992), 'Towards the Image of Dagon, the God of the Philistines', *Syria*, Volume 69, No. 3, pp. 431-450, 432.
2. Bernbeck, Reinhard and Pollock, Susan (2005), 'A Cultural-Historical Framework', in Pollock, Susan & Bernbeck, Reinhard (Eds.), *Archaeologies of the Middle East: Critical Perspectives*, Malden, M. A.: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 11-39, 22.
3. Mazar, Amihai (2000), 'The Temples and Cult of the Philistines', in Oren, Eliezer D. (Ed.), *The Sea Peoples and Their World: A Reassessment*, Philadelphia, P. A.: The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, pp. 213-232.
4. de Boer, Jelle Zeilinga and Sanders, Donald Theodore (2002), *Volcanoes in Human History: The Far-reaching Effects of Major Eruptions*, Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 68.
5. See: Armstrong, A. MacC. (June 1950), 'Trial by Combat among the Greeks', *Greece & Rome*, Volume 19, No. 56, pp. 73-79.
6. See: Seymour, Thomas D. (1900), 'Notes on Homeric War', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Volume 31, pp. 82-92, 83 & 87.
7. Nickel, Roberto (2002), 'Euphorbus and the Death of Achilles', *Phoenix: A journal of the Classical Association of Canada*, Volume 56, Nos. 3/4, pp. 215-233, 230.
8. Korfmann, Manfred; Latacz, Joachim and Hawkins, J. D. (May 2004), 'Was There a Trojan War?', *Archaeology*, Volume 57, No. 3, pp. 36-41, 41. (My italics.)
9. Macleod, C. W. (Ed.) (1982), 'Introduction', in Homer, *Iliad: Book XXIV (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-58, 58.
10. Oakley, S. P. (1985), 'Single Combat in the Roman Republic', *The Classical Quarterly*, Volume 35, No. 2, pp. 392-410, 399 (but see also 403).