

Palm Harbor United Methodist Church  
FEAR MUST FALL  
March 1, 2020

At the Ash Wednesday service, Rev. Kathy described the battle between David and Goliath. The way she described it was hilarious. I'm not even going to try to tell it the way she did. I'm sure you remember the story even if you weren't able to attend on Wednesday. Goliath, this huge, ugly, massive giant, clad in a full coat of armor was representing the army of the Philistines. Every morning he would face off with King Saul, commander of Israel's army. Goliath challenged Saul to send out his bravest man to do battle with him. The loser's army would become slaves to the winner's army. Goliath ridiculed them, jeered at them, and laughed at them and every day, Saul would drop his head, slump his shoulders, and return to his tent. Not only was Saul afraid of Goliath but there was no one in his army willing to face off against the giant. Saul offered great rewards to anyone who volunteered to do battle with Goliath but there was no one who stepped forward. Then one morning as Goliath and Saul were once again facing each other, going through their usual routine, David appeared. This teenage boy had come to bring food to his brothers in the army and he heard Goliath's taunts. He was appalled that Goliath was not only ridiculing King Saul's army but he was ridiculing Israel's God...his God...the God he loved with all his heart. So, David volunteered to defend God's honor and to go fight the giant. You must be kidding! This little guy up against the massive, armor clad, experienced warrior, Goliath.

Even though Saul was at his wits end in this stalemate with Goliath, he was reluctant to send this lad out to what he was sure would be his death. But, David insisted he was able to do the job. Saul offered David the use of his armor but it was so heavy and bulky and David so "underdeveloped" he couldn't even walk. David removed the armor and relied on the weapons with which he was familiar...a slingshot and a stone. When he approached Goliath, Goliath laughed at him, he cursed him and threatened him but David just kept walking...getting closer and closer. David offered a few threats of his own as he continued getting closer and closer. In spite of the odds against him, David was not afraid.

There are times when we all face giants in our lives. This morning the giant we are going to get to know is "Fear."

According to Louie Giglio in the book, "Goliath Must Fall," which we will be using for the next few weeks, "fear grips us whenever we believe that apart from, or in spite of, our best efforts, something undesirable is going to happen and we can't stop it. Sometimes fear is irrational and sometimes it is rational. But, no matter what kind of fear it is, it affects us."

We are constantly told not to be afraid. We even tell ourselves not to be afraid. Did you know that the most repeated commandment in the Bible is "fear not." There are 366 "fear nots" in the Bible...one for every day of the year. Yet, if we are honest, no matter how often we are told not to be afraid, we are still afraid.

You may wonder why we are talking about fear during Lent. Lent is the season when we confess our sins to God. But, what is sin? Sin is anything that separates us from God. So, if our fears are preventing us from enjoying the abundant life

God wants us to have, then it is a sin. If our fears are standing between us and our being able to fulfill God's calling in our lives...it's a sin. If our fears are preventing us from being all that God created us to be...it's a sin. So, let's confess this sin so we can remove any barriers that stand between us and God.

So, are you afraid? What are you afraid of? Are you afraid of trying something new? Are you afraid of failing?

Perhaps you have been conditioned to fear. You have heard the taunts too often.

You're too small. You can't do it! You're too old! You're too young. You don't have a chance.

You're just like your mother...or your father...or your brother.

You've been a failure all your life.

You'll never amount to anything

Once we hear these messages they become embedded in our minds and anytime we face a challenge the tape begins to play...you can't...you will fail. You can't overcome this problem whatever it is. Anytime we face a challenge, the giant of fear is staring us down, and we hear these messages and we are afraid to even try. We are like Saul, we just hang our head, turn around and walk away, give up.

Saul wasn't alone. He had an army of men who were afraid. They were all so afraid that they would fail that they would rather be humiliated day after day, after day.

Living life in fear of failure is no way to live. The giant of fear must fall. It was David's faith in God that gave him the confidence to step forward and bravely take on Goliath. David took one stone and placed it in his sling, wound up and sent it flying through the air...it struck Goliath in the center of his forehead, the one place that wasn't covered with armor. Goliath collapsed...dead. No longer a threat. So often, it takes only a little courage and a lot of faith to take down our most persistent fears.

In our New Testament scripture lesson from Matthew this morning, we see another brave man but one whose courage and faith faltered.

Matthew 14:22-33

Let's look at this story for a minute. Jesus was tired. He had been ministering to the people, teaching and healing. He was exhausted. He needed a little time away for prayer. He said, "Hey guys, you go ahead. I'll catch up with you later." Jesus went up on the mountain to pray in a quiet and solitary place. The disciples got on a boat and by evening they were in the middle of the lake. A storm came up. It was no small storm. The wind howled. Whitecaps crested the waves. The boat was tossed about.

I can tell you that this is pretty scary. Right after my parents moved to Florida, almost 50 years ago, my father bought a little fishing boat with a small motor on it. When my family came down to visit, of course, dad wanted to take us out on the boat. There were four adults and four children under the age of 10. Probably too many for such a small boat. We put the boat in the water in Dunedin and headed to Caladesi Island. After a great picnic and lots of fun on the island, we noticed dark clouds gathering in the afternoon sky. We hurriedly packed up and got everyone in the boat. By the time we shoved off the shore, rain was starting to come down. Before long the rain was coming in sheets and the wind was blowing harder and the little boat was fighting against the waves and the little engine was struggling to make headway against the tide and the rough surf. We could no longer see the shoreline and we had no navigation system or means of determining if we were even headed in the right direction. It was very frightening. We finally made it back to shore...but the memory of that outing stayed with me. I still don't like small boats and have a fear of drowning.

I don't know if the disciples feared drowning or feared their boat was too small or that it might capsize, or if they feared the boat would just sink. The scriptures just tell us the disciples felt fear.

The storm had raged for hours. It was about 3 in the morning and I'm sure they were not just afraid, they were exhausted.

Jesus decided it was time to join his disciples. Did he take a boat? No, why take a boat when you can just walk across the water.

Now, if the disciples were afraid of the storm, you can just imagine how frightened they were when they saw Jesus walking on water. Were they seeing things...were they losing their minds...no one can walk on water...maybe it was a ghost. What would be more frightening...believing they were seeing things, worrying that they were losing their minds, or seeing a ghost.

There was a man who was taking a taxi to the airport. They were almost there when he leaned forward and tapped the driver on the shoulder to tell him which terminal to go to. As soon as he tapped the driver, the driver screamed, lost control of the cab, crossed the median, careened in front of a truck, and finally came to a stop next to a speed limit sign on the side of the highway. Luckily, neither was of them was hurt. The passenger apologized to the shaken driver for startling him. The driver said, "Oh, no, it was my fault. You see this is my first day driving a cab. For 25 years, I drove a hearse.

Fear doesn't always lead to crashes. Sometimes fear shows up internally as nervousness, or worry, or stress, or dread or tension or sleeplessness, or stomach problems. Fear chews away at our lives and erodes our sense of confidence and well-being. It robs us of sleep and rest.

Jesus says, "Do not be afraid."

Really, Jesus. Are you kidding!

Of course, Peter, always the brash one...speaks up..."Well, if it's really you, tell me to come to you on the water." I don't know if Peter was challenging Jesus or just trying to make sure that his eyes weren't playing tricks on him and that this really was Jesus walking toward them in the midst of a storm.

Jesus just says, "Come."

Can you imagine? The visibility was poor, the sky was black, the waves and water were threatening to overturn the boat but...Peter climbs out of the boat and steps on the water and starts wading toward the sound of Jesus voice....that took courage. But, when he saw the wind, he became afraid and he began to sink. He cried out to Jesus, "Save me."

We know that feeling of panic, don't we...the fear in the pit of our stomach that makes us feel nauseated; our heart beating so loudly we can hardly hear; our hands clammy and our voice shaking. We hear the negative self-talk. You can't do this...you will fail.

Peter heard the negative self-talk. He was immobilized by fear. He began to sink...he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Jesus reached out his hand and caught him and said, "You of little faith, why did you doubt."

Really, Jesus! The waves were 14 feet high and the wind was blowing the rain in my face and...and...and...after all, I'd never ever walked on water before.

It's easy to empathize with Peter.

But, just as soon as Peter cried out, Jesus grabbed him. Now the storm didn't subside immediately, but Peter was safe. On the way to the boat, I can imagine Jesus saying, "It's ok, Peter, I've got you, you're safe."

So, friends, how do we conquer our fears. It's not enough just to tell ourselves not to be afraid. It's not enough for someone else to tell us we have nothing to fear. It's not enough to deny our fears. According to Louie Giglio, we need to remind ourselves that God is able. We may have worked our way into a big giant mess of fear and anxiety and stress, but God is able to slay that giant. Sometimes it happens instantaneously as soon as we call out for help like Peter did, and sometimes it requires time and a process. The process can include counseling, support, and medication. These are tools God can use to help. No matter the process, God is with you. God has reached out a hand to you. He's saying, "I've got you. You are safe. Together we can do this."

Giglio also says that it is important that we name our fears. What is that specific thing that you fear. Most often our fears are not fears of physical harm, but rather fears of emotional pain...failure and loss.

Is it a job you feel you cannot possibly accomplish?

Is it a bill or bills, you simply do not have the money to pay?

Is it a relationship that has become toxic?

Is it a disease that you fear...Alzheimer's...cancer...?

Is it conflict that seemingly can't be resolved?

Denying that we have a problem just means that we are not willing to deal with it. If we aren't willing to deal with it, Jesus can't help. We need to admit we have a problem and that we need Jesus to deal with it...we need him to slay that giant. Once we name the cause of our fear and anxiety, then we can turn to Jesus for help. Trust him to be with you and to reach out his hand and guide you to safety.

A couple of weeks ago I was babysitting for three great-grandchildren for a week while their parents were on a cruise...the youngest was 3. I can tell you it was a challenge. One evening, as bedtime neared the three year old was watching cartoons on television and the two older children were in their rooms. I went to my room at the back of the house to wash my face and get ready for bed. Suddenly, I heard this blood curdling scream. I raced through the house as fast as I could, fearing she had become seriously injured in the few minutes I had been away from her. I scooped her up and checked to see where she was bleeding..... no blood! I checked for obviously broken bones...no broken bones. Finally, she whimpered, "I couldn't see you." I had not left her...I assured her that I would never leave her alone. All she needed to do was call me and I'd be right there.

Isn't this what Jesus tells us to do. Just call me and I'll be there. I will hold you and comfort you and guide you and I will slay your giant of fear. Do not be afraid, I am with you, always.

Do you want to combat the fear in your life? The battle is not yours. The battle belongs to Jesus. He has already taken his sling and stone and slain the giant. The giant of fear has already fallen. The work was done by Jesus on the cross. Your job is to have faith in him, to keep your eyes on him...to trust him to be with you always, even in those most frightening moments of life.