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St. Andrew's, Encinitas
6/24/2018

Ordinary Heroes

Who is your hero? When I ask that question of myself, my first question is: what kind of hero? My favorite super hero? The real life example I want to model my own life after? Is it just someone I look up to and respect over-and-above others? I thought about this after reading the passages we heard this morning from 1st Samuel and the Gospel over the past couple of weeks. David and Goliath is of course the classic example of two heroes coming head-to-head with a surprising outcome that has become somewhat cliché. Nonetheless, this story permeates our culture. It's a theme that comes up in all kinds of literature, but especially blockbusters.

In Star Wars you have the rag tag Rebel Alliance taking on the Empire's Death Star. In Marvel comics, we have seen the Avengers take on insurmountable odds as a group or as individuals. Even superheroes, who are meant to stand out from humanity while reflecting some deep truth about us, take on things seemingly impossible. Captain America, Thor, Black Panther, Batman, Superman, on and on, taking on fearsome and destructive foes intent on either annihilating or subjugating those who the heroes work to protect. We are somehow deeply embedded with this story and the idea that one unlikely hero can overcome the stacked odds, it offers hope and promise. We want to be David, or at least be on his side.

But, have we ever asked ourselves who we are in this story, either as a group or as individuals? Are we David, young, handsome, but too short and not strong enough to be a soldier, a mere shepherd not well regarded by anyone? Are we the Israelite soldiers, standing by, unable to move with fear of death from a foe far more intimidating than ourselves? Are we the Goliath, so cocky, boastful, and determined that we ignore any potential weakness because we perceive ourselves as a dreadnought, an inevitable winner? Are we Saul, a chosen leader who is totally

incapable of doing more than sending others out to die before us? Or perhaps worst, are we the Philistine soldiers, idly mocking our enemy because we are so sure of our own hero and his hubris?

No matter who we think we may be in this story, there is a subtler truth in this story, that heroes often arise out of a storm of events, conflict, disaster, tragedy, and either overcome obstacles or adapt to them in such a way that others see a new way to act or live. The people who show up when it seems darkest and hardest are often the heroes.

We are living in a time when a great deal of things seem dark, or dangerous, or just depressing. There are so many conflicts in the world, and we want peaceful resolution to them all, but it often feels like there is next to nothing that we can do about any of it. It's then that we are most like the disciples in the boat with Jesus. "Aren't you paying attention God? Don't you see all that's wrong?" And then it happens, Jesus stands up, and shouts "Peace! Be still!" And just like David's stones fell Goliath, so Jesus's words cast a great hush upon the lake of Galilee, to the shock and amazement of all. "Why are you afraid?" he asks, "Have you no faith still?"

And maybe that's where most of us actually are, in a boat with all these other people, witnessing the thrashing of waves and wind against all of us. The cry of children without their families comes to mind as one way we hear the storms of this world. People fleeing violence and oppression, seeking justice, hope, and renewal, in waves that crash up against our reality, calling us to remember that not every life is beachy, sundrenched, and affluent like our own here in Encinitas. Lamentations of refugees lap up everywhere, not just our own borders. For those who may not have known, this past Wednesday, June 20th, was World Refugee Day. The Anglican Communion, the larger body of churches St. Andrew's is part of, posted a picture on Instagram

that day and quoted Matthew 25.35: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”

These are words that calm the storms we currently feel. What if we’re the ones who speak those words? What if we’re not just bystanders, but really meant to take the place of David, or Jesus? Remember, Christ has no body but yours in this world, as Theresa of Avila said, which Andi Tillman reminded us some time ago. If we are to be as Jesus in the midst of this world’s storms, we ought to cry out “Peace! Be still!” at the top of our lungs and from the mountains to the shore!

We offer this world comfort and peace by being God’s people, we must be the peace ourselves. This isn’t to say we can’t be upset, that we can’t lament, moan, and wail with the world. That too is part of our calling. But the gospel demands that we not stay there, but that we move through the suffering of the cross, through the harrowing of hell, through the darkness of death, and become resurrected life, illuminated in the light of Christ, gloriously risen. Peace, be still.

We as a congregation do that in many ways, we are overflowing with programs, so much so that we are bursting to the seams. There are often times when it is quite difficult for us to simply house all that we have going on at once because of our spatial limitations. We only have so many rooms, and yet each of them is near constantly serving someone, our campus itself is alive with children, the hungry in soul or body, the volunteer seeking to help, and us as a body seeking divine inspiration. Everyone who walks through our doors is a hero in some way, and we need to build more space if we are to shape more heroes now and in the future. For us locally, Goliath is all the challenges of hunger, housing, education, and sounding the call of God’s graceful and liberating love to our neighbors. If we are David, we need to follow our bold

calling, using the resources God has amply blessed us all with, to continue to inspire each other towards more discipleship. Our people and our buildings are the stones by which we fell the issues that arise among the wider flock of Encinitas. It is no mistake that a shepherd boy took down the mightiest of Philistine heroes. David was chosen by God, and yet was totally ordinary.

We are ordinary heroes, the ones who stand up when we see injustice, name it, and work towards an end of it. As I sat writing this sermon this week, the news came that families unfairly torn apart may be rejoined. That's the reminder that we can, should, and need to speak peace to the storm, to use words and actions of peace to tackle Goliath. The ills of the world can only begin to be healed when we live that peace, prayerfully, in hope.

Brenda and I set out this month in our sermons to put before us all the question: What are you here for? We've heard how we are here to bear our character flaws as our strengths, that we are here to practice faith, hope and forgiveness, that each of us is a seed waiting to grow, and I feel called this week to add: We are here to speak peace to the storm, to bear witness to the one who is obeyed by the cosmic elements. We are here to be in awe of the acts of God that are bigger and bolder than we can ask or imagine. We are here to be heroes, ordinary everyday heroes who speak kindness and live grace and joy in the face of cruelty, darkness, and deceit. We are here to be witnesses of the truth, that God is calling us all into deeper faithfulness to each other for the sake of the world God loves so much.

There are a lot more Goliaths and a lot more storms out there. What words will we speak, and what actions will follow?

Peace. Be still.