

REFLECTION PART ONE - DAVID AND GOLIATH

Of course, if we were growing up today, I am not sure we would be allowed to hear the story of David and Goliath. It's a bit gory – especially the bit at the end, which we didn't read

...then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it.

Goliath was a big man... How big?...

Maybe it's a bit like the 'I caught a fish ----this---- big'?

Goliath, we are told, stood 6 cubits and a span

cubit = length from elbow to tip of the middle finger ($\approx 1\frac{1}{2}$ feet)

span = distance from the thumb to middle or little finger

stretched out (that is, half a cubit)

That makes him 9 feet 9 inches tall (or 2.97 metres)

Records show that Robert Pershing Wadlow, born 22 February 1918, was and still remains the World's Tallest Man at 8 ft. 11 in. Sadly, he died at the age of 22.

Now I know Australians are rather obsessed with "big" things. After all we have the Big Prawn, the big Banana, the Big Koala, etc

And here we have the "Big Man".

But maybe Goliath wasn't such a big man!

David certainly wasn't afraid of Goliath, despite all the taunts being hurled back and forth. Goliath's insults weren't the blows that Goliath intended.

David was used to insults. He was, after all, the youngest of eight boys. My youngest grandson would no doubt agree, and he's the youngest of just three boys.

David knows that he is Israel's next king, anointed by Samuel. He has no idea what awaits him when his father sends him to check on his brothers on the battlefield. When David arrives, the talk is all about Saul looking for someone to face the Philistine champion, Goliath. Forty days of taunts had done their work. None of the Israelite fighters wants to take him on but undeterred, David volunteers for the job.

You have to wonder where his confidence comes from. It didn't come from his family. No one, not his father nor his brothers even considered David when Samuel visited the family looking for Israel's next king. David was happy with his responsibilities as a shepherd, keeper of the family's sheep. He had no companions except God and the sheep. Perhaps this is where he found his confidence in God.

DAVID VERSUS GOLIATH

This is not just any battle. This is a battle for the life and soul of Israel, an obscure nation that is barely rated. When David wins with only his slingshot, it is a victory not just for David, but for the fledgling nation as well. The people see it as confirmation that God is David's silent partner in this fight. Because of this event, Israel's story would continue, David's story would continue. The connection between David and Israel would last for generations – through his kingship, the Babylonian exile and return and rebuilding, and defeat by the Roman empire.

The world loves the David and Goliath story, or any victory when the underdog wins.

Just about everyone knows about David and Goliath. Even those who never step foot inside a church have heard the story of David and Goliath. It symbolises the little man winning over the big man. For us, this story serves

as a reminder that with God, we can be victorious, even in the most difficult situations.

REFLECTION PART TWO - THE BIG STORM

Now we come to yet another "big" thing. The Big Storm!

Most Australians would have some knowledge of "The Fremantle Doctor", the wind, that on summer afternoons blows in from the south-west along the coast of Western Australia, bringing cool relief from summertime high temperatures. In the days of sailing ships, ships would lie offshore waiting for the afternoon wind to carry them into the Fremantle Dock. (Mind you, some present-day AFL footballers or cricketers may regard the "Fremantle Doctor" a little less favourably).

The Sea of Galilee is known for its violent storms, which can erupt suddenly. Small boats caught out on the sea are in immediate danger. These tempests are caused by the situation of the lake in the Jordan Rift with steep hills on all sides. The Sea of Galilee lies 680 feet below sea level. The cooler air masses from the surrounding mountains collide with the warm air in the lake's basin. When the contrasting air masses meet, a storm can arise quickly and without warning. Plus, the Sea of Galilee is relatively shallow, just 200 feet at its greatest depth. A shallow lake is "whipped up" by wind more rapidly than deep water, where energy is more readily absorbed.

For Mark's audience, the storm would bring to mind larger-than-life, mythical images and stories and songs of antiquity. They believed the chaos dragon lived in the sea and it was a common belief that storms in the sea were caused by the sudden rising of the chaos dragon. Storms were a kind of tidal wave caused by the great dragon, a symbol for the cosmic powers of evil. We find the chaos dragon in the background of stories in the Old Testament and the Psalms. For example, the story of the flood in Genesis reflects the

Eastern myths of the chaos dragon. Contemporary movies have developed their own repertoire of signs of the powers of evil (think Jaws, etc).

So, this story is not so much about Jesus managing nature and the elements as it is a struggle against demonic and destructive powers, whatever they may be. If you like, the calming of the storm is like the slaying of the dragon. (And I say this as one who is a big fan of Game of Thrones!)

Let's look to the story. A few phrases stand out –

1. JUST AS HE WAS

Jesus is exhausted. He has been teaching all day and is tired. He gives no explanation for his desire to travel across the Sea of Galilee in the evening instead of waiting until morning which would make for a safer voyage.

...He said to them, 'let us go across to the other side'. And leaving the crowd behind, they took him in the boat, just as he was.

What does this phrase mean? It could simply refer to the fact that they left immediately and Jesus remained in the boat from which he had been teaching. Or it could imply a kind of familiarity with Jesus on the part of the disciples. They took him just as he was, because they knew him 'just as he was'. That familiarity is about to be blown away by the storm that approaches.

2. GOING TO THE OTHER SIDE

Going to the other side may also have implications for us. The other side of the sea (the eastern side) was inhabited predominantly by gentiles while the populations of the villages where Jesus was conducting his ministry on the western side, were mostly Jewish.

We also face going across to 'the other side' – finding ourselves in situations which are not comfortable or familiar to us. As a country of immigrants, think

of the generations of migrants leaving home to travel to the other side of the world.

You should note that just after this, Jesus encounters rejection on the other side and returns to the west.

3. OTHER BOATS WERE WITH THEM

Those on Jesus' boat were not on their own. The implication of the other boats being with them is that this was a kind of boat party on the lake. They were all going across the sea with Jesus and his disciples. It was a wonderful evening and everything was great. The sudden windstorm changed that!

The disciples woke Jesus up and told him that they were about to be swamped by the waves. Does the fact that Jesus remained sound asleep imply indifference? Perhaps that's why they wake him up and ask him

...teacher, don't you care if we are about to die?

It doesn't matter to the disciples that Jesus was exhausted. To them what matters is that he appears indifferent to their situation. This can be a frequent experience of God, in which God appears to be indifferent to situations of life when we are about to be overwhelmed by the powers of chaos. This story gives a context for the experience of God's seeming indifference to our being overwhelmed.

Because then Jesus wakes up and rebukes the wind.

Bill Loader says,

The extraordinary image of Jesus commanding the elements has less to do with managing nature than it has to do with portraying the gospel as a struggle against demonic and destructive powers. The gospel, according to Mark, is about Jesus coming to liberate people from such forces. It is to see Jesus as the embodiment of God's power, the bearer of God's spirit, to

challenge and overcome the deep and destructive powers which the furies of nature symbolised. It is a vision of Jesus with apocalyptic dimensions: here is the slaying of the dragon.

We may consider the world of this story is a long way from our life.

Demonology is totally foreign to our way of thinking. But we can connect this to our time. We can identify the powers that destroy and distort and endanger, and then see salvation as the overcoming, the liberation from such powers.

There are forces in the world which push us around just like a storm. These can be things that go wrong in our brain that make us mentally ill or unable to remember, or the social issues of discrimination, alienation and poverty that seem to try and limit our lives. The gospel of Mark identifies some of these powers, or forces, and says to us that Jesus helps us to overcome them.

If we get into arguments about whether the story of the storm is literally true, we have missed the point. It is more than just a story.

Symbols such as these should not be reduced to flat statements of belief.

They invite wonder and reflection.

They inhabit dreams and visions.

They are there when words and definitions fail.

People know what it is like to be buffeted.

People know what it is like to have no control.

People know situations where only the divine can intervene.

People still cry, 'Lord, save us'.

What is asserted here is hope, and in its context, struggle.

Rick Brand tells us that this story is important to the Christian faith because it is evidence that having Jesus with us in the boat is never a guarantee that there will not be storms in our lives.

And even though Jesus is with us, many of us, like the disciples can lose hold of our faith. In their fear the disciples expected Jesus to care about them and save them from danger.

What did Jesus say?

Jesus spoke the words, "Peace! Be still!" The words had an effect on both the disciples and the storm. Jesus' actions to speak to the winds and the sea (those hostile storms outside) also exerted control over the disciples' fear and mistrust.

There is a connection between the power of evil manifested in the storm, and the power of evil that is manifested in conflict and war. There is a connection between the storms of life and the storms of history, which Jesus calms. The gift of Jesus Christ is the gift of peace and of true stillness in the midst of great storms.

He woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!

Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.

AMEN