



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 5, Proper 7 – Year B
June 24, 2018

[RCL]: 1 Samuel 17: (1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49; Psalm 9:9-20; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41

1 Samuel 17: (1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49

Because this text includes one of the most famous stories of the Bible, it can be tricky to get to a deeper level when many of us are accustomed to encountering it in a simplified, Children’s Bible version. A couple pointers, however, might help us move beyond a cartoon concept and into, ideally, more theological territory:

1. We must not fully dehumanize Goliath by thinking of him as some sort of gargantuan monster. In fact, the text is very clear; he is a large Philistine and a champion. Beyond his strength and size, however, his religious identity as a pagan is a key component of the story. It is fitting, then, that a *huge* warrior would represent the non-Jewish tribes and peoples of the world, while a small shepherd boy would be the symbol of God’s covenanted people. Curiously, the Masoretic text (from which we derive the New Revised Standard Version of the Old Testament) identifies Goliath as being “six cubits and a span” in height, which is nearly ten feet tall. The older Septuagint text, however, identifies him as being *four* cubits and a span, which is closer to seven feet tall – still very impressive.

2. David’s unlikely triumph is about the victory of God over oppressors, and the triumph of those who put their full trust in God. David, after all, could have used the protection of a helmet and body armor, but he took off the armor that Saul gave him. By doing so, he placed his full trust in the God of Israel.

- What kinds of invisible armor do we need to remove?

Psalm 9:9-20

What a fitting response to the first lesson! These verses from Psalm 9 communicate both confidence in God’s promises and strength and a sober confession of suffering. Like most goods psalms, there is a range of human emotion that can sometimes seem like our very own inner dialogue. This psalm is a terrific paradigm for personal, private prayer, whether silent or aloud, in that it doesn’t censor that inner dialogue. Although the psalmist speaks mostly in declarative sentences and in the imperative, there is a great deal of uncertainty found in these lines. After all, to say that the needy will not *always* be forgotten (v. 18) implies that they are, in fact, forgotten at the present time.

- Do we censor our emotional content when speaking directly with God?

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

“We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours.”

St. Paul makes a passionate defense to the Corinthians about the trials endured by true servants of God. The list is exhaustive and extreme; few would wish to endure any of the items on it! The point he makes, however, is that joy and life can somehow be found in all of those terrible situations. Let us be honest here: secular society does not think in this seemingly naïve, reckless fashion. It is entirely countercultural and confounding to sign up for something that could lead to such treacherous outcomes.

The Way of Jesus Christ, however, makes no guarantees of physical safety and freedom from assault. In fact, the Christian life is one of endurance and perseverance in pursuit of holiness and in the midst of community. The Corinthians, like so many church communities, were experiencing struggles as they pursued discipleship together. The lack of openheartedness here is attributed to their affections, which seem to be improperly placed; monks in the Greek Athonite tradition might say that they were distracted by the passions of the world. As such, their hearts were not fully open to each other, to their spiritual shepherds, or to God. I cannot help but wonder how they received the encouragement and admonition from St. Paul that we read in today’s passage.

- How might we be more open as disciples of Jesus Christ and members of broken communities?

Mark 4:35-41

Today’s Gospel lesson, found in all three Synoptic Gospels, can be understood as a Chalcedonian revelation. The Council of Chalcedon, also known as the Fourth Ecumenical Council, took place in 451. The main outcome of the council was the understanding that Christ has two natures, human and divine, and that they are inseparable, unique, and eternal. While all Christians did not fully adopt this understanding, the vast majority did, and it continues to be an article of faith today. With that lens, we may now jump into the story.

When the disciples went to alert Jesus about the impending storm and its dangers, they found him sleeping down below. While most humans aren’t capable of sleeping during wild windstorms, all humans need to rest – Jesus was no exception! The Incarnation did not skirt or shirk any element of physical human participation, especially not rest. Once he emerges from his nap, Jesus takes charge of the wind and calms the storm. Suddenly, our focus is shifted from the very human nap to the very divine ability to control the weather!

Another fun component of this story is that it is a wonderful way to understand the Church; Jesus and his disciples are traveling together on a boat. At the beginning of the story, Jesus was not immediately visible, though he was entirely present. When the disciples’ fear set in during the storm, they called upon their Teacher, and he calmed the storm and their anxieties. Even though they knew Jesus and had been traveling around with him, they were amazed and surprised that the wind and sea obeyed his commands.

- How does Jesus surprise you?

Gus Chrysson is a seminarian of the Diocese of Costa Rica presently studying at Virginia Theological Seminary. Originally from North Carolina, Gus comes from a large family with Greek and Costa Rican roots. Prior to seminary, he worked for many years as a full-time musician in New York City, specializing in vocal and choral music. Gus continues to be active in music ministry through singing, conducting, and overseeing a new partnership with the Diocese of Cuba. When he is not in church, he is most often in the kitchen.