

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL TO WORSHIP:

The LORD reigns for ever;

he has established his throne for judgement.

He rules the world in righteousness,

and judges the peoples with equity.

The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed,

a stronghold in times of trouble.

(Psalm 9.7-9)

Let us worship God.

HYMN: Praise to the Lord, the Almighty!

PRAYER OF APPROACH AND CONFESSION:

Almighty and holy God, source of life and love:

We come into your presence to worship you, grateful for your love for us, and conscious of our need for you. In our time of worship, we pray, speak the words you want us to hear, and enable us to hear them. May our time of worship thus help to give us strength, encouragement, and guidance as we continue our service for you in the week ahead.

We confess, however, that we fail you far too often. You call us to serve you in the footsteps of Jesus, but too often we look to our own interests first. You call us to love our neighbors, but too often, we find fault with them and withhold our love. You call us to do justice and to care for the vulnerable, but too often we prefer to be silent, and to let the vulnerable fend for themselves.

Forgive us, gracious God, through the sacrificial death of Jesus; and through the influence of the Holy Spirit, enable us to treat the people around us with the love, kindness, and compassion with which you treat us.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior; and we pray together, now, as he taught us:

THE LORD'S PRAYER

(Matthew 6.9-13, KJV)

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:

Hear this good news from the scriptures:

God made Jesus, who had no sin,

share our sin,

so that, in him,

we might share God's righteousness.

(2 Corinthians 5.21)

So, if we have confessed our sin to God sincerely, let us be assured that God will forgive us.

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

- **First Reading:** 1 Samuel 17.32-54 - David defeats Goliath

This is part of the famous story of David's victory over the Philistine giant, Goliath. Goliath has challenged the Israelite army to choose one person to fight him. No one has dared to accept this challenge except David, who's not even in the Israelite army! The only reason he's even present is that he has just delivered some food from home to his older brothers, who are in the army.

- **Psalm:** Psalm 9.1-2, 7-20 - "I will give thanks to you, LORD, with all my heart"

Psalm 9 is a lament — that is, a person's prayer for God's help against enemies who are harassing him. In addition to the writer's plea for help, the psalm contains words of praise for God and expressions of trust in God — as is often the case in laments.

The psalm expresses the kind of trust in God that David must have felt in his encounter with Goliath.

- **Letter Reading:** 2 Corinthians 6.3-13 - The hardships that Paul has endured

This reading is part of a much larger passage in which Paul defends himself against the criticisms of rival apostles.

In this passage, he lists various hardships that he and his associates have suffered in the course of their mission work, in order to emphasize that their work isn't something they're doing just for their own benefit.

- **Gospel Reading:** Mark 4.35-41 - Jesus calms a storm on the lake

This reading is the account of Jesus' calming of a storm on the Sea of Galilee. It comes at the end of a chapter in which Jesus tells several parables.

SERMON: "Simply Trusting"

Everyone likes a good "David vs. Goliath" story — a story in which a person or a group of people take on a much stronger person or group, and win. In today's society, David vs. Goliath stories often involve legal battles, such as a court case between an individual or group of people and a government; or one between a small business and a large corporation. We *like* to see the underdog come out on top, don't we? We find comfort in hearing that, sometimes, at least, a little guy can win a fight against a big guy; that, sometimes at least, the powerful people or entities in the world don't always get their way.

In today's Old Testament reading, of course, we have the *original* "David vs. Goliath" story — David, the lightly armed teenaged Israelite boy, versus Goliath, the gigantic, well-armed and

heavily armored Philistine warrior.

It's an interesting story — entertaining, even — but, unfortunately, it's a bit too long to read in its entirety in a worship service. It takes up an entire chapter — fifty-eight verses. So I encourage you to take some time to read the *whole* story — in 1st Samuel, Chapter 17 — on your own.

The story begins with the Israelites and Philistines preparing to go into battle against each other. Each side, of course, seeks to gain territory at the expense of the other. The Philistines, however, have a formidable weapon — a giant, a one-man fighting machine named Goliath. According to the biblical account, he is over nine feet tall, and wears armor weighing some 125 pounds! He challenges the Israelites to make the battle a fight between just two men — himself and one Israelite.

Unfortunately, the Israelites don't have a comparable soldier. Even King Saul himself, who is taller than average, is nowhere near as big as Goliath. And so no one has the courage to take Goliath on. For forty days, Goliath shouts a challenge across no man's land to the Israelites on the other side; but no Israelite dares to accept the challenge.

There's a sense in which this contest between David and Goliath happens by chance. David is not in the Israelite army — not yet, anyway. He's at home in Bethlehem, tending his father Jesse's sheep. However, his three oldest brothers are in the Israelite army — the same three brothers who were mentioned in last week's reading: Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah.

The only reason that David happens to be there at all is that his father sends him to the front to deliver some provisions to his brothers — and to bring back news of how they are doing. It's while David is on this errand that he hears Goliath issue his daily challenge to the Israelites. As any teenaged boy would be, David is curious as to what this is all about, and so he asks some Israelite soldiers what's going on. He asks, *Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?* (1 Samuel 17.26), and the men explain the situation to him. David's presence is then reported to King Saul, who sends for him — and that's the point at which today's Old Testament reading begins.

It is David himself who offers to take Goliath on; no one asks him. With great self-assurance, and even sounding cocky, he says to King Saul, *Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him* (1 Samuel 17.32) — meaning he himself.

The rest of the story, of course, is very well known. Most of us, I'm sure, first heard it when we were kids. David declines the armor and weapons that Saul offers him, arms himself with only a slingshot and five stones, and heads out to face the enemy. After Goliath and he take turns trash-talking each other, David lets the first stone fly. It hits its mark, and Goliath falls to the ground. David then finishes him off with the giant's own sword. Seeing this, the Philistine army panics, and flees. The Israelites, on the other hand, take courage from David's victory. They pursue the Philistines, and the battle ends with a decisive Israelite victory — a rout, in fact.

David's self-confidence in taking Goliath on comes not only from his skill with the slingshot, but also from his belief that this is in fact a *holy* war. This is not just his battle, but God's, he believes; and he is therefore confident that God will give him victory. What he said to Goliath before using his slingshot was this: *You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day, the LORD will deliver you into my hands All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands* (1 Samuel 17.45-47).

We find a somewhat similar scenario in today's Gospel reading, in which the lives of Jesus and his disciples are threatened, although not by a human enemy, but rather by the forces of nature — in this case, a violent storm on the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus has spent the day speaking to a crowd along a stretch of shoreline, using a sailboat as a kind of floating pulpit. Mark records a few parables that Jesus told on that occasion, two of which we read and reflected on last Sunday. Now it is evening, and Jesus suggests to the disciples that they cross over to the other side of the lake. The Sea of Galilee, of course, is actually a freshwater lake, not a sea; and, by Canadian standards, it's not even a particularly large lake. On my globe at home, it looks much smaller than Lake Manitoba, and smaller even than Lake of the Woods. At least four of the disciples — Peter, Andrew, James, and John — are experienced fishermen, and know how to handle a sailboat; and so Jesus leaves it to them to pilot the boat across the lake, while he himself takes a nap in the back. Since it's evening, it's probably getting dark by this time.

It's then that the storm comes up. Big waves slosh over the side, and the boat begins to fill with water. The disciples realize that the situation is serious, and they wake Jesus up. In *Matthew's* version of this story, they say to Jesus, *Lord, save us! We're going to drown!* (Matthew 8.25). But here in Mark's account, they don't ask Jesus to *save* them; rather they say, *Teacher, don't you care if we drown?* (Mark 4.38). It's not clear whether they expect Jesus to perform some kind of miraculous rescue, or simply to help them bail water out of the boat. Indeed, it sounds like they're chastising him for sleeping at such a time!

Jesus, of course, does more than help with the bailing; he calms the storm. In Mark's original Greek, he speaks just two words, which literally mean "Be quiet" and "Be muzzled" (Mark 4.39). The wind dies down, and so do the waves. The crisis is suddenly over, and their lives are no longer in danger.

But the story isn't quite finished. Jesus now has a question for the disciples: *Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?* (Mark 4.40). It's a telling question, isn't it? If the disciples had believed and trusted that Jesus could rescue them from that hazardous situation, they wouldn't have been afraid. But they don't know Jesus well enough yet; they don't understand who he is; they don't know the extent of his power — and so, in the midst of the storm, they were afraid. They seriously believed their lives were in danger.

Interestingly, Mark concludes the story by saying of the disciples, *They were terrified, and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!”* (Mark 4.41).

Terrified? Terrified of what? Of Jesus, apparently. Jesus has just done something that they would otherwise have thought impossible. They’ve already seen Jesus do miracles of healing, but this is a miracle of a whole other order. Keep in mind that, at this point in Mark’s Gospel, they’re not yet aware of Jesus’ true identity. For now, though, they suddenly realize that they’re in the presence of someone who wields unbelievable power — and that’s what scares them.

Jesus’ calmness in the midst of the storm corresponds to David’s self-assurance in taking on Goliath. Of course, Jesus would’ve *known* that he was capable of stilling the storm, and that he and the disciples were therefore in no serious danger. But, if the disciples had been out in the boat by themselves, it might’ve been a very different story.

In the Old Testament reading, then, we have a person facing danger and possible death from a hostile person. In the Gospel reading, we have a group of people facing danger and possible death from hostile natural forces.

In today’s reading from the Letters, the apostle Paul describes various hardships that he has experienced in the course of doing his mission work. Some of these hardships are simply the nature of the work itself, such as *hard work, sleepless nights, and hunger* (2 Corinthians 6.5b), while others are the doing of hostile adversaries, such as *beatings, imprisonments, and riots* (2 Corinthians 6.5a). Paul lists these hardships and challenges for his readers, not in order to boast, but rather to make them understand that he and his associates are sincere in doing their mission work, and that they’re not just doing it for their own benefit.

Why does Paul engage in this ministry when it results in so much hardship, hostility, and difficulty? It is because he was called by God to do this work, and because he trusts that he will be vindicated in the end. In the reading from the Letters two weeks ago, we heard him say, *Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal* (2 Corinthians 4.17-18). In other words, Paul looks beyond the problems and hardships of the present to the glorious life of the age to come. Doing so gives him the courage and encouragement he needs to persevere in his mission work, in spite of the difficulties and hardships he experiences.

It’s not quite the same as David fighting Goliath, or as Jesus and his disciples caught in a violent storm on the lake, yet there are similarities. Paul trusts that he is doing the right thing; that he is doing the work that God has called him to do. And further, he trusts that the glorious life of the age to come will make his troubles in the present look “light and momentary” by comparison.

In the Season after Pentecost, the lectionary readings for each week don’t always have a theme in common, but this week, it just happens that they do. That theme is “faith” — faith in

the sense of trusting God and his purposes.

In the Old Testament reading, David believes his fight against the much more powerful Goliath is actually God's fight, and so he trusts that God will give him victory. In the Gospel reading, the disciples fail to believe that Jesus can save them from drowning in the storm on the lake, and so they give in to fear and panic. In the reading from the Letters, Paul believes and trusts in a glorious life in the kingdom of God in the age to come, and that trust gives him the strength to persevere in his mission work, in spite of all the hardships and difficulties he experiences in the present.

Faith doesn't just mean believing certain things *about* God; it also means trusting in God, and trusting in God's purpose for the world and for us ourselves. Christian faith therefore has a strong future orientation. It doesn't just look back to the past, but also looks ahead to the future — the future that God has in store for the world, and for each of us.

In his ministry, Jesus proclaimed the coming and the nearness of the kingdom of God. In doing so, he expanded the understanding that his contemporaries had of what the kingdom of God was all about. For them, it was all about the independence and prosperity of Israel. They were looking for God to bring back the golden age of the reigns of Kings David and Solomon, during which Israel reached its largest size, and was free of foreign domination. Jesus pointed instead to a world in which people of all nationalities and races would voluntarily submit to the God of Israel, live in his ways, and live in peace and harmony with each other. He pointed to a world in which the power of evil would be brought under control, so that people would no longer be subject to physical disabilities or mental illnesses. His ministry of healing gave people a glimpse and foretaste of what that world would be like.

However, this doesn't mean that by trusting in God, we will succeed in everything we attempt, or escape every hazard, or survive any disaster that may befall us. What it does mean is that God has a future in store for us that will make the difficulties, hardships, setbacks, and crises of the present pale in comparison. Trusting in that future, as the apostle Paul did, will give us the courage, strength, encouragement, and hope we need to endure the hardships, misfortunes and injustices of life in this age.

Admittedly, this is the perspective that led Karl Marx to dismiss religion as “the opium of the people” — that is, to claim that the Christian faith dulls people's pain enough to make them willing to accept social injustices such as low wages, long hours of work, unsafe working conditions, inadequate housing, and so on, rather than to struggle to improve their standard of living.

Marx had a point, of course, and he was right to argue that we should struggle to overcome social injustices, rather than just passively putting up with them. However, the fact remains that there are difficulties and hardships in the world that are beyond our human capabilities to overcome. The power of evil in the world is pervasive and persistent. Not all hardships can be overcome; not all injustices can be put right — and certainly not in the span of a single human lifetime. We do need the vision and hope of a better life in the age to come to sustain us in the present. We do need to trust in God's purpose for the world and for each of us; otherwise we

are liable to sink into despair.

Let us then trust in God's long-term purpose for the world, and let us be sustained by that trust as we struggle with the Goliaths and the storms that threaten to overwhelm us. Like Paul, let us *fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal* (2 Corinthians 4.18).

HYMN: Simply trusting ev'ry day ...

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

Faithful and compassionate God:

We are grateful for your love and care for each one of us — that you provide us each day with the things we need, and that you give us strength, guidance, and encouragement in times of difficulty or danger. As we reflect on today's scripture readings, we pray that you would strengthen our faith and trust in you. In each situation of distress in which we may find ourselves, we pray that you would calm our fears, and enable us to trust that you are with us and will see us through the crisis. In each situation, give us courage, strength, and guidance, and help us to be confident that you are with us, to support and encourage us.

We pray for your church and its ministry. On this National Indigenous Peoples Sunday, we pray in particular that the church here in Canada may be genuinely committed to the process of reconciliation and healing. We pray for your continued guidance and blessing on the church's ministry with Indigenous people, such as the Kenora Fellowship Center in northern Ontario, Winnipeg Inner City Missions in Winnipeg, and our own Presbytery's outreach to the Birdtail First Nation. We give thanks for those who give leadership in all such ministries, and we pray for your continued guidance, inspiration, and strength for all of them. We pray that Indigenous people may find that the gospel message is healing and life-giving, and that it encourages kindness, compassion, and generosity.

Hear our prayers for members of our two congregations and others close to us who find themselves in situations of difficulty today, especially those who are dealing with powers or forces stronger than themselves. In particular, we pray for those whom we now name before you in silence: _____ . Grant each one the assurance of your presence, we pray, and grant them strength, guidance, healing, or encouragement, according to their situation and their needs.

We pray for the world around us, as well. On this National Indigenous People's Sunday, we give thanks for the Indigenous people of our country. We give thanks for their growing pride in their own ethnicity and culture, and for efforts being made to revive languages and traditions that the residential school system sought to suppress. We pray that you would bless efforts being made to help individuals, families, and communities heal from the traumas and abuses of the past, and to bring about greater prosperity. As we pray for people in positions of authority to-

day, we pray that our federal and provincial governments may make every effort to respond positively to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, as well as the Calls for Justice made by the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. May Indigenous people increasingly find their rightful place in Canadian society, and enjoy its benefits on an equal basis with everyone else.

On this World Refugee Day, we are reminded that the number of refugees around the world continues to increase, and that the difficulties they face have only been compounded by the pandemic. We pray that you would bless the efforts of agencies and organizations that provide assistance to refugees; and we pray that people in the more stable and prosperous countries of the world may show more compassion and hospitality toward them.

We pray for the family, friends, and colleagues of Constable Shelby Patton, who was killed on the job last weekend. Grant them your comfort, strength, and support, we pray, and grant that they may also feel the support of the general public.

And we continue to pray about the ongoing pandemic. We give thanks that numbers continue to decrease, and that more and more people are receiving vaccinations. We pray for wisdom for public health officials and for our provincial and federal governments, as they make decisions about easing restrictions — that those decisions may be made carefully, so that there may not be another outbreak of infections. At the same time, we pray that the pandemic may be brought under control during the summer, and that we may begin returning to normal in the fall.

We thank you that you hear our prayers, gracious God, and we offer them up to you in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

OFFERING

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND DEDICATION:

God of grace and love:

We give you thanks and praise for your presence with us, and for your love and care, especially in times of distress and hardship. We thank you for the support of family members, friends, fellow church members, and even strangers, through which we experience your love and care. We thank you that, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, you have shown that the powers of evil and death are no match for you, and that all who believe in Jesus will share in his victory over death.

We express our gratitude in action as well as in word, as we present our offerings to you. Through them, we support and participate in the work that your church does in your name, to help you bring about your loving purpose in the world.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

HYMN: Jesus, lover of my soul ...

COMMISSIONING AND BLESSING:

Sisters and brothers in Christ:
Go into the week ahead, now,
in peace,
and in the strength of the Holy Spirit,
confident that God is always with you,
and trusting him to guide, strengthen, and sustain you.
And may God bless you:
May he assure you of his love and care,
and may he give you strength and peace;
in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.