

An Odyssey

On the evening of that day, he said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side of the lake."
 So they sent the crowd home and took him with them in the little boat in which he had been sitting, accompanied by other small craft. Then came a violent squall of wind which drove the waves aboard the boat until it was almost swamped. Jesus was in the stern asleep on the cushion. They awoke him with the words, "Master, don't you care that we're drowning?"
 And he woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the waves, "Hush now! Be still!" The wind dropped and everything was very still.
 "Why are you such cowards? What has happened to your faith?! he asked them.
 But sheer awe swept over them and they kept saying to each other, "Who ever can he be? - even the wind and the waves do what he tells them!"

David and Goliath – it's a classic. The little guy on the side of the angels beats the odds against the evil Muscle Man. Might KO'd by Right. Individual courage and creativity succeeds against the military machine (a stone wins over an AK 47). Goliath stood 10 Ft. tall in his stocking feet and with full amour he looked like a Sherman Tank. This story celebrates how one brave, faith-filled young man made a huge difference to the future of Israel.

It also is a story to warn communities like us, for we here in Lexington, here in America, are more likely to be thought of as Goliath than David in our dealings with other communities or nations.

It is also a story about how heroic humans deal with life, even while plagued with fear. With the Philistines on the other hill, the Israelites looked for protection to their King but that day Saul was shaking in his boots. Enter David, our hero, who refuses to wear armor for he has embarked on a journey of trust in God.

Which brings us to Mark Chapter 4 which scholars have noticed bears a definite likeness to book 10 of Homer's Odyssey. In order to speak with cultural familiarity to his Greek audience, Mark tells the story of Jesus through the Greek medium of a Hero's journey. For those of you who might have forgotten your Homer – here are the points of similarity.

- Odysseus said farewell to Aeolus...
- Jesus said farewell to the crowds.

- Odysseus boarded with his crew and sailed...
- and with twelve ships.
- Disaster came at night...
- Odysseus slept at the stern...
- The greedy crew opened the sack of winds.... "and created a storm:
- "The crew wept...
- Odysseus awoke and gave up hope...
- Odysseus complained of his crew's folly...
- Jesus boarded with his disciples, "and other boats were with him."
- "When evening had come."
- Jesus slept at the stern.
- A storm arose "and there was a great gale of wind
- The disciples were helpless and afraid.
- Jesus awoke and stilled the storm
- Jesus rebuked his disciples for lack of faith.

Jewish Christians understood Jesus as the Son of stone throwing David – you remember the shouts of Palm Sunday. But Greek Christians identified with their cultural hero - the son of a god through a mortal woman who has the ability to become a god. Once the parallels were drawn, it was easy for a new audience, unfamiliar with David and Goliath, to understand Jesus.

But of course, Mark has given it a twist. Just as the Odyssey was not a simple report of one man's journey, but a call for all humankind to face the journey of life with courage and daring, So too Jesus heroic life is a call for all who receive the "good news" to live our life after his example, and with something more, the resurrected Christ as our companion.

Mark asks, "Why did these weathered seamen let a storm on a small lake throw them into a dither?" The disciples had no doubt exercised heroism countless times before in such Galilean storms, so where was their courage today? And when the winds stop, that is exactly what Jesus asks... "Why were you such cowards? Have you still no faith?"

In this Greek context, Faith didn't mean dogma, nor a Pharisees' list of what is clean or unclean living. This faith isn't something achieved by creed. This Faith is the certainty that the mystery that is out there is larger than we could ever imagine and is daring us to encounter it. Faith is the understanding that, no matter what, we are held in God's love.

Einstein once articulated what he thought was the most important human question - "In the end, do you believe that the universe is a friendly place, or not?"

Mark has some fun portraying the disciples as dim-wits. Someone suggested that in Mark, we should pronounce it the—duh-sciples. When Jesus says, "Why don't **YOU** deal with the storm? You are the seamen here. Exercise your own faith!" The duh-sciples didn't get the point – the whole episode made them even more awestruck: "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" Soon they will simply be agog with metaphysical awe and practically useless.

There is a Buddhist expression, "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him," Perhaps it is a caution against falling in love with our mentors; against putting them on pedestals, or regarding them as more than human - A warning not to project what we long for into them.

Twice more in Mark we see Jesus trying to free the disciples from this kind of vicarious heroism: when he walks over the water to them and at the feeding of the five thousand. We know from Mark's comedic commentary "And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand" that his intention in including these stories in his gospel is not to show that Jesus is divinely powerful beyond measure and the first disciples are mere mortals, but rather to reassure his contemporary, post-resurrection Greek church members that unlike the those first dim-witted duh-ciples, they, the newly enlightened reading his book, "get it". For with the risen Christ journeying in their midst they are empowered to do "greater things than these".

I recently saw the DaVinci Code. One of the interesting threads of this mystery is the highlighting of the Gnostic denomination within the early church. Their answer to the question "Was Jesus human or divine?" created a Big Furor. Governments fell and people died because they couldn't get the mix or the method of the mix just right. As we learned from Dan Brown, the Gnostics would have been pleased if Jesus was married and fathered a child,

making him slightly more human. Then it would have been the spark of divinity within him, fueled by special knowledge that made him like God. This is not, however, what the Council of Nicaea decided. This issue is far from settled, even today. Protestants have always maintained that Mary, Jesus' Mother, had other children a claim that leans toward humanizing Jesus. And when the Roman Pope Pius in 1857 announced that Mary was "immaculately conceived" this was a move toward the divinity side in a theological conflict that has never really ended.

How much was God involved in David's victory over Goliath? Did God direct the stone? How much success can be attributed to David's confidence that no lasting, eternal harm could come to him because he was God's man? And what of the storm? So often, even now, this story is told with Jesus divinely ordering the winds and waves? And yet Mark may have been telling the story as a cautionary tale against disabling hero worship.

Joseph Campbell says that Heroic stories are fascinating because they tell us something about how women and men realize their greatest potential and move their societies forward. The heroic journey is an essential part of vital human community. When nobody is taking this journey, community and culture decay. How would you describe your odyssey? Your journey through the storm? Your courageous adventure of faith?

The disciples wanted to follow a "Son of David" hero someone more violent and powerful than the Philistine-like Romans. What they got instead was the "Son of Man" more human than they had known God could be, a hero who would not embrace power, but gave himself over to self-sacrificing, radically inclusive love and peace.

When you joined Hancock Church, it was either a start, or a milestone in your own hero's journey. Each week we bring our own journey to church, and know that it is a safe place to talk about that journey. Our tradition gives us encouragement and support.

- When we say: "It's impossible"...
- we say: "I'm too tired"...
- We say: "I can't go on".
- We say: "I can't
- God says: All things are possible (Luke 18:27)
- God says: I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28-30)
- God says: My

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| <p>figure things out"...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We say: "I can't do it"... ▪ We say: "I'm worried"... ▪ We say: "I feel all alone"... | <p>grace is sufficient (II Cor. 12:9)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ God says: I will direct your steps (Prov 3:5-6) ▪ God says: You can do all things (Phil 4:13) ▪ God says: Cast all your cares on ME (I Pet 5:7) ▪ God says: I will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5) |
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Giants call out. Storms arise. Cancer returns, accidents claim lives. Legal battles are lost and families are harmed. We cry out, "Teacher, is it nothing to you?" Jesus speaks sharply, "Why are you such cowards? Don't you have any faith at all?" If we are to have clean air to breathe or places of wilderness and beauty, If we are to repair a garish world divided between rich and desperate, or, as was evident in last week's Minuteman, even build a Lexington community extravagantly welcoming of difference, we will need heroic courage and faith.

Enter into the Hero's Journey. Like David, be a person who dares to face the biggest giant because God is with you. Like the Duh -sciples, learn, perhaps eventually, to be like Jesus in both word and deed.

When I was a child, I learned a song version of an old Bretton prayer.

My boat is so little the harbor's so wide
But Jesus is holding my hand.
When he is my pilot it all goes so well
On the way to the heavenly land.

Amen.