

Week 4 of our sermon series on King David and David takes centre stage. Of all the stories in the book of Samuel about David, the story of David and Goliath has to be the most famous, and David becomes the star of the show. Or does he? We just might come back to that.

David has been secretly anointed as the next King of Israel. Secretly? Yes, no big public announcement, no-one except Samuel and the family know anything about this, and, as we shall see, David's brothers continue to treat him as simply, the little brother.

We are told that the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. I was more than a little concerned when I read this verse. Why would God appear to send an evil spirit to torment Saul? Yes, Saul had disobeyed God, but why would God want to make things worse?

Well, rest assured, this is not as bad as it sounds. In the gospels we hear about evil spirits quite a lot, and how Jesus cast out evil spirits from people, and the disciples tried to do the same – not always successfully. But in the Old Testament there is no real concept of evil spirits in the same way. Indeed this comes down to a bit of a translation issue. The Hebrew word in this story is more like the English word bad, than evil, and whilst it can also suggest something morally bad, it can also suggest that the things it is describing is more something that brings trouble, or suffering, rather than what we might imagine an evil spirit can bring.

So this is probably more like a bad temper, than something hugely sinister, and as we progress through the story of David's struggles with King Saul, we will see plenty of Saul's bad temper.

And Saul wants someone to help him cope with his bad temper and along comes the young David, a gifted lyre player, who enters Saul's service as a part time musician, and when David played, Saul calmed down.

Whilst I have added a few extra verses to the recommended reading this morning, to include the full picture as described would have been simply too much. Suffice it to say, Goliath must have been a very impressive, extraordinarily scary, figure to face. This idea of a champion to fight the battle for your entire army is an interesting one. It clearly save a lot of bloodshed, as only one person, from the whole skirmish, will be killed, but I have to say I am not sure whether I think it is a particularly sound idea.

Perhaps a slight digression, but we are in the middle of an election, and our political system revolves around 650 members of parliament being elected, but to what extent are we affected by what our local candidate thinks, and to what extent are we much more influenced by the words Rishi Sunak, Keir Starmer, Ed Davey, and actually as far as his relatively new party is concerned, Nigel Farage? Are they the champions in that case? Are champions a good idea? Is it good to rely on one person? Just a thought?

Back to our story, and after all the hollering of Goliath, David speaks for the first time in the bible. David, still the youngest son, and so gets the 'youngest son' jobs, is sent to the battleground to take some provisions for his three brothers who are part of the Israel army, and to their commander. After having had a good look round, and witnessed Goliath doing his stomping and shouting, he asks those around him, 'What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?'

And straight away David is adding some theology into the situation. He clearly defines Goliath as a non-believer, and his side's armies as the armies of the living God.

And then we get this lovely interaction with his elder brother. "What are doing here? Who's looking after the sheep? You've just come to see the battle." And I suspect he may have actually added, "Go

home". And David's response. "What have I done? I only asked a question?" I love it. I've just asked a question! You mean you have just brought God into the situation.

And then David, who remember has the job of keeping Saul calm, goes to Saul and basically says, "Leave it to me – I'll sort it!" But no, that's not what he says.

"Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God.

The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine." This is a battle between Goliath, and God, and David has no doubt who will win.

Not only that, but David is also looking back and saying the reason that he has been able to protect his sheep from Lions and Bears is because God was protecting him. This, being prepared to look back as well as forward is so important for us too. Our faith is sustained in the present and for the present as we remember God's provision for us, God's help for us, in the past. The rich history of all the amazing things God has done for people over the centuries should reassure us that he is there for us today and tomorrow. If we stay close to him; if we live our lives with him and for him, then he will be with and for us.

And that is what David made sure that everyone witnessing his battle with Goliath were aware of. Goliath taunted David, almost laughed at him. But before David did what David did, he made sure that everyone watching and listening knew why he was doing it, and how he was going to win. "This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand." And it was all over, very quickly. But of course it wasn't David who was the star of the show – it was God, using David as his means of protecting His people.

Which all makes this following God seem really easy doesn't it.

But then we have that storm in our second reading.

The Sea of Galilee has quite a reputation – apparently even the car parks on the western shore have signs warning drivers of what happens in high winds. The sea can get very rough very quickly, and big waves can swamp cars parked on what looked like a safe beach. So perhaps it was no real surprise when, as they were crossing to the other side in what I assume was not the largest of boats, with Jesus asleep in the seat where a special guest would sit, when a storm hit. But then the Jews were not really, unless of course you were a fisherman, a seafaring people; they left that to their Phoenician neighbours to the north. The sea came to symbolize, for them, the dark power of evil, threatening to destroy God's good creation, God's people, God's purposes. For Mark's readers they would have associated the sea with Jonah who, instead of doing what God told him, sailed in the opposite direction and, at his own suggestion in the middle of a storm which was about to sink their ship, was thrown overboard. Or they may have associated it with the flight from Egypt, and that crossing of the Red Sea. Or even further back the story of creation when God's new world was created by the parting of the seas. So this story becomes one of Jesus exerting God's Power on the sea.

But it is also so much more than that. It is a story of faith – in believing that Jesus, as the son of God, had that power to exert; in believing that God would protect them as they were in that storm. And that out of that storm came peace, that peace can come out of even the wildest, most frightening of times, or storms of life.

A peace that can come in the storm of sorrow. When sorrow comes as it must He tells us of the glory of the life to come.

A peace that comes when life's problems involve us in a time of doubt and tension and uncertainty. But sometimes when we do not know what to do, when we stand at some crossroads in life and do not know which way to take, that peace will come.

A peace that comes in the middle of storms of anxiety. The chief enemy of peace is worry: worry for ourselves, worry about the unknown future, worry about those we love. But Jesus speaks to us of a father whose hand will never cause his child a needless tear and of a love beyond which neither we nor those we love can ever drift. In all these storms Jesus brings us the peace of the love of God.

So do those two stories bring us an overall picture of how challenges, confrontations, scary moments can be helped through the care of, and faith in, our God and his Son Jesus Christ? Absolutely they do. And the answer comes through remembering that we are not alone.

David was not alone. Yes, he clearly was an expert with the sling and stone but there is surely a world of difference between protecting your sheep against wild animals where, if it goes wrong, you may be in danger as may your flock, and representing your nation, God's chosen people, against a trained, very large, very well armed and protected, soldier. But of course David was not wholly reliant on his own skills – God was with him.

And those fisherman on the sea were not alone. There were, in that boat, experienced fisherman who must have been used to what the Sea of Galilee could literally throw at them yet we are told that they were all scared, they were expecting to die in that storm, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

Thankfully, you and I are unlikely to face a giant Philistine or a life-threatening storm at sea in a fairly primitive boat. But that doesn't mean we don't face challenges. Perhaps there are things not quite working out in our lives. Perhaps we have decisions that we need to make about a career, or a retirement, or a financial matter, or a health issue, or a school, or advice to a friend, or something to do with your church commitment. The advice that David, or Jesus, would give you is don't try to make those decisions alone. God was with them, and is with us. He was with them then and he is with us now. And what is more he always will be.