

Sermon for Christ Church, Spotsylvania, VA

Proper 7, Year B, June 24, 2018

The Rev. Bill Queen, "Power in the Presence of God" (Healing Prayers)

1st Samuel 17:1a, 4-11, 19-23, 32-49, Mark 4:35-41

today's Gospel presents the miracle of Jesus calming the wind and the sea, demonstrating his power over the forces of nature; we should not be too surprised at this, as throughout the Old Testament we have been told over and over again that God created all of the natural world; God said to Job (Ch. 38), "I laid the foundations of the earth ... laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy;" imagine that; it wasn't just a big bang, as the astrophysicists tell us, it was a big musical bang; and it is through Jesus' close connection to the creator God that he came by his godly power over the created world, the same way he had the power to heal, to cast out demons, and to bring the dead back to life

we also have another kind of miracle, but something miraculous nonetheless, in the story of David's killing of Goliath; we probably recall this story from our youth more as a story about the weak overcoming the strong, or the humble overcoming the boastful; but look closely at the details; David clearly attributes his previous abilities in overcoming wild and fierce lions and bears to the power of the God, not to his own strength; and so too, in his fight with Goliath, he triumphs not by his strength or by his cunning, but by the name of the Lord; it is neither sword, nor spear, nor even a sling and a stone that wins a battle: it is the power, as David says, "of the living God"

underlying each of these miracles is a message more powerful than the miracles they describe; for each miracle is but a one time event, over and done with, in history, involving other people, out of the realm of our experience with God or with Jesus; but in each story we are given the promise that what God and Jesus did then, for those people in each of those stories, can be done similarly, for us, now, in our lives

the message from both of these miracles is this: there is power in God's presence, there is power in Jesus' presence, and similarly, though we need to look to other Bible stories for examples, there is power in the Holy Spirit's presence too; also, from both of these miracles, we see additionally that God's

power is available to us best when we are actively aware of God's presence and power, and when we are also actively present to God in return

on the boat, the disciples were not reassured by the fact that Jesus was there, in person, with them, maybe because he was sleeping; they only receive the benefit of his power after waking him up and communicating their distress to him; and they didn't even realize he had such a power until, in response to their need, he had demonstrated it to them

similarly among the army of the Israelites, God only exercises his power when the young shepherd boy David calls upon him by name, invokes his presence, and reminds everyone of the the power that God has to wield; the Israelite army mistakenly thought it would be up to them, in their limited human power, to try and defeat the giant warrior Goliath

both of these stories remind us that we can only expect to receive the presence and power of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit if we are willing to communicate our needs, in prayer, with the expectation that God has the power, the desire, and the ability to answer our prayers; and I am not suggesting that we wait until a storm is swamping our boat, or that we are facing a giant, literally or figuratively, before getting to know God through prayer that both communicates to God and listens to God's responses to us in return

both of these stories remind us that the power and presence of God comes to us most fully when we make ourselves present to God through a regular, habitual, prayerful relationship with him, and that through such a relationship we will come to know and feel God's 24/7 presence with us and come to trust God's power, God's desire, and God's ability to change the circumstances of our lives in a loving and compassionate way

following the service today, once the rest of the congregation has left, I invite anyone who has a particular need of prayer to join me, Margaret, and a member of our prayer team up here beside the pulpit; you may have a prayer concern for yourself, or it may be for another person; it may be for a situation in our community, in our nation, or as large as to concern for the whole world; you may have more than one concern; we call this a time of healing prayer, but don't take that word "healing" in too narrow a sense; we can pray for healing for a condition of body, of mind, or of spirit; we can pray for healing

for broken relationships between individuals or between groups; we can pray for healing from dangers or from injustices; or we can pray for the positive healing of peace; so just about anything can fall under the rubric of “healing prayer”

we pray together because we can help each other form the words of prayer, especially when our own prayers may be difficult to articulate; we pray together because Jesus specifically promises to be present with gatherings of believers: “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” as he said in Matthew 18:20; we pray together because, as a group, we are better able to be actively aware of God’s presence and power, and to make ourselves actively present to God

we can’t promise that God, Christ, or the Holy Spirit will immediately answer your prayer; we can’t promise that every storm threatening you will be immediately calmed; we can’t promise that you will triumph over every giant you have to face; we can’t promise that you will experience a miracle; but think about it, we’ve already received our miracles: new life in Christ now, and eternal life with Christ to follow after this life on earth; what’s the calming of a storm or the slaying of a giant compared to these miracles?; we can, together in prayer, all become more aware of our living God’s promise to grace us with God’s presence and with god’s power; we invite you to come and experience that for yourself