

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year: B

Job 38.1-4; 8-11; 2 Cor 5.14-17; Mk 4.35-41

Karate Kid

One of my favourite movies is **The Karate Kid**. It is about a teenager who feels alone and unprotected in the hostile environment of his school and community. He is scared - unable to defend himself against the aggression of his neighborhood. He is afraid.

It happens that the lad - whose name is Daniel - meets an old man, Mr. Me-ogi, who has a black belt in Karate - and the old man agrees that he will teach him what he knows so that he can protect himself.

On the first day of his lessons the old man asks Daniel to wax and polish several old cars that he owns - wax on - wax off. All day the lad labours to follow these instructions - Wax on - Wax off.

On the second day the old man asks the boy to paint his fence - paint up - paint down. Again it takes all day.

On the third day the old man asks him to sand the wooden floor of his verandah - in a circular fashion - and again it takes all day.

At the end of the third day the boy is very angry - I've done all this work for you, he says, and you still haven't taught me anything.

At this point the master tells Daniel to stand in front of him and do the motion for wax on - wax off - and lo - as he does this - the master makes to hit him - and his blows are deflected by the boy's arms.

The boy's work for Mr. Me-ogi - his obedience - has made him ready for his first lesson in how to face danger; it has prepared him for the lessons, and the dangers, to follow.

Are We Afraid?

In the course of our lives there are many things that arise that cause us to fear. There are giants who are hostile to us and all that we hold dear. **There are storms that threaten to overwhelm us. For each of us the dangers are different, the things we fear - vary from person to person, and the intensity of our fear likewise varies.** I know people who are afraid to drive in city traffic, others who dread speaking in public, and still others who are terrified by the thought that they might get cancer.

Different Fears

Some people fear being alone - others worry and fret about becoming unemployed, or having to face an abusive spouse, still others must fight against the giants of addiction or face the huge machines of governmental indifference and corporate cruelty. There are many dangers out in the world - and we do right to fear these dangers. Fear is a natural reaction - a God given reaction - to those things that threaten us. But fear - while natural - can - if it is listened to too much - if it is indulged - lead to paralysis.

Fear Destroys Us

Fear can prevent us from dealing with what threatens us; and it can - in the end - permit the thing we fear to destroy us; not just our bodies, which will pass away in any case - but our hearts, and our minds, and even our very souls. That is what was happening at the time when the Philistines came to make war on Israel during the reign of King Saul.

Arrogant Goliath

The Philistines came with a champion - Goliath of Gath - and he was huge - over nine feet tall, and he was well armed and well armoured - and he challenged the Israelites to send a man against him - and whoever won the battle - his side would win the war. Each day, for forty days he issued this challenge - and each day - the Israelites fled at the sight of him.

All were afraid - none would go forth to do battle - except for David - the youngest child of his family - the one who had been relegated to tending his father's sheep while his older and bigger brothers conducted business and served in the army of King Saul.

Triumphant David

On the 40th day David - while carrying provisions to his brothers where they are camped with the army of King Saul - sees Goliath, hears his challenge - and is shocked by the fact that no one will oppose him - and volunteers to go forth to vanquish him. As we heard - David has a hard time convincing Saul to allow him to do this - Saul is sure that the boy is too small - too inexperienced - but David tells him that he can prevail - that he has killed Lions and Bears who have threatened his father's sheep - and that he can, with God's help, defeat Goliath.

And David does - he defeats Goliath - and he does so not with the weapons of war that Saul sought to equip him with - a sword, a helmet, and a coat of mail - but with the instrument that he used as a shepherd - a sling - and with the name of God.

The Real Trick – GOD

When we practice the ways of God - when we obey his commands and trust in his name we can overcome our enemies; we can overcome our natural fear and do what must be done.

The trick - if it can be called that is to gain a perspective on the danger we are in; to understand that God is able to help us - and that he will help us, that he has power over the wind and the waves that he can still the storm and calm the troubled waters, that he can triumph in the face of overwhelming odds because he is the Lord of Hosts - the God who is over all.

Let Go – Let God

It is a marvellously liberating thing to let go - and to let God, to trust God to make things come out right instead of worrying about how we are going to make it happen, to decide to act in His will instead of worrying about how to do what we want to do, instead of trying to fix everything on our own.

I think what most of us really fear is being out of control - of meeting forces that are greater than we are and not being able to do anything about them.

Boat in the Middle

That was the situation in Israel at the time of David and Goliath, and it was certainly the case in the boat in the middle of the storm in the Sea of Galilee. The Israelites when they saw Goliath and the disciples when they saw the wind and the waves felt powerless - they felt overwhelmed and unable to help themselves - unable to overcome the danger around them.

We fear what we do not know. We fear what we cannot control.

David knew from where his strength came - he knew who was in charge – who could help him: Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. And again, The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid?

God be my Strength

When you grow afraid, when you doubt that you will be able to take another step, when you feel you will surely perish, remember God is fully able to help you - that as he helped David slay Goliath, despite the overwhelming odds, and as he calmed the storm that threatened to overcome the small boat in which the disciples sought to cross the Sea of Galilee, so he is present with you to overcome that which would overcome you.

Remember our overwhelming God can overcome overwhelming odds, and practice what God seeks to teach you through Jesus Christ, and through his Spirit as you obey his will day by day.

Practical Conclusion

Pray - Read - Meditate and worship, for these things help prepare us for the day of trial, they centre us in the living heart of our living God providing for us an anchor which keeps the soul steadfast and sure and a rock which cannot move.

"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you."