

“The Hero’s Journey”

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Fathers Day

1 Samuel 17:32-49

Mark 4:35-41

[David told Saul,]

“Don’t let anyone lose courage because of this Philistine!”

“I, your servant, will go out and fight him!”

1 Samuel 17:32

Let us pray... O God,

In the journeys of our lives, strengthen us to the tasks before us.

Equip us for the battles we face with creativity and courage.

Amen

Joseph Campbell was a student and teacher of, the world’s sacred stories,
or myths – in their best sense, as explanations for truth.

He is credited with describing a common narrative
found in the sacred stories of many cultures which he called
‘the monomyth’ – or ‘the hero’s journey’.

One of the elements of the monomyth is ‘the search for the father’ –
which can be understood personally or in a broader sense as a search for God.
Campbell summarizes the basic outline of the monomyth narrative in this way:

*A hero ventures forth from the world of common day
into a region of supernatural wonder:*

*Fabulous forces are there encountered
and a decisive victory is won:*

*The hero comes back from this mysterious adventure
with the power to bestow boons [or blessings, upon others].*

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monomyth>

An example is “The Wizard of Oz”,
when Dorothy goes from the black & white world of Depression-era Kansas
she enters “over the rainbow” to the land of Oz.

There, she meets Munchins, a scarecrow, a tin man, a cowardly lion,
and a Good Witch who help her defeat a Bad Witch.

Dorothy and her companions return to receive from the Wizard of Oz
the insight of blessings they already had.

The story of David also follows this narrative:

David, who was the youngest son of Jesse, stayed home to guard the sheep
while his brothers had gone off to fight in Israel’s war against the Philistines.

When he was sent to bring care packages from home to his brothers,
he saw Goliath the Giant defying the army of Israel.

Willard, p.2

He offers to fight the giant on his own terms, and defeats him with a slingshot.

David is celebrated for his prowess and wisdom,
eventually to become the King of Israel.

Isn't this a familiar storyline for many popular movies and cartoons
that we enjoy?

We get programmed early with this scenario

of the good guy who rides into a town being terrorized by a bad guy.

Despite various misadventures and near defeats,

the good guy takes out the bad guy and peace is restored – until next week.

“Popeye” and “Gunsmoke”, and just about any violent superhero movie these days,
all teach us how ‘might’ makes things ‘right’.

We see it operating in terms of the challenges facing us in the world these days,
and we take some comfort that there are policemen who are
clever enough and confident enough to catch dangerous criminals.

Wouldn't we all like someone to ride into town on their white horse
to solve all our problems.

However, this doesn't seem to happen often enough
or in ways that are ethically fair for everyone.

It is also an easy storyline to twist to groom suicide bombers and racist assassins.

There is a countermyth – and according to anthropologist Rene Girard,
it can be found throughout the Bible, especially in the Gospel stories of Christ –
where the victim is the hero.

Our Gospel lessons for the past few Sundays have been following a narrative series
found in Mark chapters 2 to 5 that describes a day in the life of Jesus Christ
that begins with a Sabbath morning.

After a miraculous healing at a synagogue, an argument with some scribes,
the choosing of the 12 Disciples, and an afternoon of telling parables
to a huge crowd on the beach, Jesus takes a break from ministry
by sailing with his disciples across the Sea of Galilee.

They are caught up in a raging storm that threatens to swamp their boat
and sink them – while Jesus was sleeping in the stern.

The disciples wake him for ‘all hands on deck’ to either bail water – or abandon ship.
Yet what Jesus did was not what they expected...

Do we actually believe that Jesus commanded the elements of nature
to dissipate a storm – and that this is what literally happened?

Well, whether things happened this way or not, Jesus seems to have had more faith
in the disciples' skills as sailors than they did themselves.

He chides them for being afraid – and may very well have gone back to sleep,
while the disciples were puzzled with new fears about who he really was.

Willard, p.3

Like David, Jesus stood up to a gigantic, physical adversary –
in this case, a windstorm at sea.

The first time I realized the danger with such a storm was in the lead up
to the second of five hurricanes that hit Florida in the summer of 2004.

I met a neighbor in the middle of our street and we were talking under a sky that was
still clear, though the news said Hurricane Charley was headed our way
as a Category 4 storm!

He told me he'd been through one before – and I could see he was terrified.
That storm – just five hours before we expected landfall in our region,
suddenly turned inland and devastated the Punta Gorda area.

When I came to The Villages in 2010, people still remembered
the Ground Hog Day tornado of 2007 that hit here, Wildwood, and Lady Lake.
There were 8 people killed, 25 people injured, over 1200 homes damaged
and 300 homes destroyed.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007_Groundhog_Day_tornado_outbreak

That gives us a context for the kind of danger that the disciples feared
and that Jesus boldly confronted and calmed.

When we consider that the word for wind in Greek and Hebrew
can also mean “spirit”, it suggests that – in a figurative way,
Jesus was scolding the evil spirit of fear.

The story that follows this one in the Gospel of Mark is a continuation
of Jesus' heroic journey with the disciples, telling us what happened
when they arrived on the far shore of the Galilee.

It has something to say about current events and specifically about
the evil spirit of fear that can sometimes take hold of a society...

And they came to the other side of the sea...

Traditionally, the demons' name is “Legion”, but “Division” works, too,
as both a military organizational structure like the Roman Army “legion”,
but also the sly activity of evil that divides people against each other.

Rene Girard tells us that the “single victim mechanism” of scapegoating
serves to limit violence in a community by unifying everyone against someone.

He uses the story of the Gerasene demoniac as an example
for how a society can be corrupted by the convenient demonization
of a person – or group of people.

Michael Moore in his documentary, “Bowling For Columbine”,
about gun violence in the United States, makes the point that
African-American men have been demonized in this way.

Willard, p.4

The politicizing of illegal immigration is another example
of the convenient utilization of scapegoats.

Undocumented immigrants are vilified as “illegals” who have broken the law,
while providing a source of cheap labor.

The mentally ill also serve as another category of ‘usual suspects.’
The least of these – the minority in our midst, serves a political-economic system
that seeks a ‘permanent underclass’ to maintain itself
just like the Roman Empire of Jesus’ day, backed up by its legions.

When Jesus took away the demoniac as an excuse for the Gerasene people
to have a boogie man, it was like taking away a crutch.

That is why they asked Jesus to leave.

He broke the vicious cycle of naming, blaming, and shaming.
So, what now for the man who had been possessed by demons?

*As Jesus began to climb into the boat,
the man who was no longer possessed by demons said to him,
“Let me just be with you...”*

Jesus came initially to proclaim God’s Kingdom of Heaven
as a Beloved Community that would be its own reward.

He would model how this would come about through his heroic willingness to be
the victim himself for the false sacrifice we too often require of each other.

He did this to break the endless cycle of scapegoating and save us all –
even our enemies.

The Charleston 9 had something that was almost as good as a gun –
they were ‘nice’ to this strange young white man
who sat in on their Bible study and who almost didn’t go through
with his murderous plan because of their kindness.

There was something even more remarkable that happened
when this person was brought before the judge for his bond hearing –
and confronted by emotional family members of the 9 people he killed.

They said they forgave him. They said they were angry, but they forgave him
and would pray for his soul. Their pastor would be proud to know this...

Let us remember these people who died as unjustly as Jesus had been crucified,
and may their sacrifice bring about lasting change in our land.

Let us remember their heroic loved ones who refused to be tempted into revenge and
let us remember we are them, those who remain and can still act in this world
to do something – creatively to overcome evil with good,
and that no matter who you are you or where you are on life’s journey,
it can be a hero’s journey, too.

Amen

Cynthia Hurd

Susie Jackson

Ethel Lance

The Rev. DePayne Middleton-Doctor

The Hon. Rev. Clementa Pinckney

Tywanza Sanders

The Rev. Daniel Simmons Sr.

The Rev. Sharonda Singleton

Myra Thompson

*Our first scripture lesson today is 1st Samuel 17:32-49
from the Common English Bible translation.*

*It is the classic story of David's confrontation with Goliath
and how he began his journey to become the King of Israel...*

[32] "Don't let anyone lose courage because of this Philistine!" David told Saul.
"I, your servant, will go out and fight him!"

[33] "You can't go out and fight this Philistine," Saul answered David.
"You are still a boy. But he's been a warrior since he was a boy!"

[34] "Your servant has kept his father's sheep," David replied to Saul,
"and if ever a lion or a bear came and carried off one of the flock,
[35] I would go after it, strike it, and rescue the animal from its mouth.
If it turned on me, I would grab it at its jaw, strike it, and kill it.

[36] Your servant has fought both lions and bears.
This uncircumcised Philistine will be just like one of them
because he has insulted the army of the living God.

[37] "The Lord," David added,
"who rescued me from the power of both lions and bears,
will rescue me from the power of this Philistine."

"Go!" Saul replied to David.
"And may the Lord be with you!"

[38] Then Saul dressed David in his own gear,
putting a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head.

[39] David strapped his sword on over the armor,
but he couldn't walk around well because he'd never tried it before.

"I can't walk in this," David told Saul,
"because I've never tried it before." So he took them off.

[40] He then grabbed his staff and chose five smooth stones from the streambed.
He put them in the pocket of his shepherd's bag
and with sling in hand went out to the Philistine.

[41] The Philistine got closer and closer to David,
and his shield-bearer was in front of him.

[42] When the Philistine looked David over, he sneered at David
because he was just a boy; reddish brown and good-looking.

[43] The Philistine asked David,
"Am I some sort of dog that you come at me with sticks?"
And he cursed David by his gods.

[44] "Come here," he said to David,
"and I'll feed your flesh to the wild birds and the wild animals!"

[45] But David told the Philistine,
“You are coming against me with sword, spear, and scimitar,
but I come against you in the name of the Lord of heavenly forces,
the God of Israel’s army, the one you’ve insulted.
[46] Today the Lord will hand you over to me.
I will strike you down and cut off your head!
Today I will feed your dead body
and the dead bodies of the entire Philistine camp
to the wild birds and the wild animals.
Then the whole world will know
that there is a God on Israel’s side.
[47] And all those gathered here will know
that the Lord doesn’t save by means of sword and spear.
The Lord owns this war, and he will hand all of you over to us.”
[48] The Philistine got up and moved closer to attack David,
and David ran quickly to the front line to face him.
[49] David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone.
He slung it, and it hit the Philistine on his forehead.
The stone penetrated his forehead,
and he fell facedown on the ground.

Let us be guided and challenged by these words...

Mark 4:35-41

[35] On that day, when evening had come, he said to them,

“Let us go across to the other side.”

[36] And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was.

And other boats were with him.

[37] And a great storm of wind arose, and the waves beat into the boat,
so that the boat was already filling.

[38] But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion;

and they woke him and said to him,

“Teacher, do you not care if we perish?”

[39] And he awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea,

“Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

[40] He said to them,

“Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?”

[41] And they were filled with awe, and said to one another,

“Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?”

Mark 5:1-20

[1] They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Ger'asenes.

[2] And when he had come out of the boat,

there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,

[3] who lived among the tombs;

and no one could bind him any more, even with a chain;

[4] for he had often been bound with fetters and chains,

but the chains he wrenched apart, and the fetters he broke in pieces;

and no one had the strength to subdue him.

[5] Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out, and bruising himself with stones.

[6] And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped him;

[7] and crying out with a loud voice, he said,

“What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?

I adjure you by God, do not torment me.”

[8] For he had said to him,

“Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!”

[9] And Jesus asked him,

“What is your name?”

He replied,

“My name is Legion; for we are many.”

[10] And he begged him eagerly not to send them out of the country.

[11] Now a great herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside;

[12] and they begged him,

“Send us to the swine, let us enter them.”

[13] So he gave them leave.

And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the swine;

and the herd, numbering about two thousand,

rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

[14] The herdsmen fled, and told it in the city and in the country.

And people came to see what it was that had happened.

[15] And they came to Jesus, and saw the demoniac sitting there,

clothed and in his right mind, the man who had had the legion;

and they were afraid.

[16] And those who had seen it told what had happened to the demoniac

and to the swine.

[17] And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their neighborhood.

[18] And as he was getting into the boat,

the man who had been possessed with demons begged him

that he might be with him.

[19] But he refused, and said to him,

“Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you,

and how he has had mercy on you.”

[20] And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decap'olis

how much Jesus had done for him; and all men marveled.

There is a more complex series of elements of the Monomyth

Departure

Call

Refusal of the Call

Supernatural aid

Crossing the Threshold

Belly of the Whale

Initiation

Road of trials

Meeting with the Goddess

Woman as temptress

Atonement with the Father

Apotheosis

Ultimate boon

Return

Refusal to return

Magic flight

Rescue from without

Crossing threshold

Master of the Two Worlds

Freedom to live

The Cosmogonic Cycle

Emanations

The Virgin Birth

Transformation of the hero

Dissolutions

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hero_with_a_Thousand_Faces

<http://www.billstifler.org/HUM2130/files/2D-001-00-creation.htm>