

1 Samuel 17:1a, 4-11. 19-23, 32-49

Psalms 9:9-20

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Mark 4:35-41

*“He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?’
He “rebuked the wind ... and it ceased. And they were filled with great awe.”
(from Mark 4:35-41)*

The scripture readings this Sunday offer us an invitation to ponder a choice between fear and awe as we face the issues before us in our various life situations. Fear is a very primitive human emotion. It involves both a biochemical response and a high emotional response. It alerts us to the presence of danger and possible physical harm. That is its good side. But it can also have a detrimental effect, paralyzing us when we need to take action.

David is fearless in his encounter with Goliath in today’s first reading. In our second reading, Paul boldly perseveres in proclaiming the Gospel in the face of many hardships, beatings, and imprisonments. David and Paul are set forth as exemplars of the power of God’s grace at work in the human person. But what about Jesus’ disciples in today’s gospel reading? Maybe we can more easily identify with them. They are disciples-in-training, and so are we.

This Sunday’s readings invite us to look deeply into our relationships with God. Should I be fearful or not? At times the Bible tells us that we should “fear God.” At other times we are told to “love God with all your heart and mind and strength.” This can all be very confusing. The English language is sometimes impoverished in its attempt to convey the words of scripture. In Hebrew there are two different words, *pachad* and *yirah*, the meanings of which are conveyed with only one word, “fear,” in English. The first is used to indicate fear in the sense of fright and an alarm to a danger lurking before us. The second is used to connote reverential awe, the kind of feeling we have when we unexpectedly experience something so mysterious, so tenderly loving, so ineffable, that we are humbled and words fail us.

Jesus asks his disciples, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” The word “still” is key here. Faith and trust are not powers that can be mustered from within us; they are based on our prior experiences of God’s action in our lives. The same was true of the disciples. It took Jesus’ reminding them of God’s care for them in the stormy winds to bring them to their senses. In effect, Jesus is saying, “You have been with me; you know who I am and what I am about. Why are you still afraid?” The question asked by Jesus is asked of us too. Has God been faithful in God’s promises to me... to you? Remember, the promise is not that life will be trouble-free, but

that God will be with us regardless of the storms that may come our way. When I have finished, take a minute or two to reflect on that question.

I can only share my own experience of God and God's faithfulness in my life. I have not been spared the pain of fearful times, nor has every instance of fear been vanquished in a way that I had hoped for, or expected. No faith known to humankind can promise or provide that kind of assurance. But God has been faithful and continues to be faithful in in caring for me. Faithfulness is the hallmark of God's love, and love is the hallmark of God's relationships with us. In the First Letter of John we read, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). I am still a "disciple-in-training"; we all are. And my loving—and your loving too—has not yet reached perfection. That will happen only when we come face to face with the Holy One Who Is Love. But, by the grace of God, we are on our way.