

“Disarming The Giant”

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave to fear,
but you received the Spirit of Sonship. And by him we cry,
“Abba, Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness
with our spirit that we are children of God (Ro. 8:15-16).

While walking down the hall of the VA hospital to the Cardiac Critical Care Unit to visit my mother this week a familiar picture on the wall claimed my attention. It was the picture of a young child on her knees, hands clasped in prayer. The difference between this picture and the one that hangs in church is that the caption under the praying child at the hospital reads: Faith in America. Now misplaced trust of this sort reminded me of the part in David's life and death battle with the giant Goliath when David tried on the protective gear that King Saul gave him.

Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul's sword over the armor and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, “I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them” So David removed them. (1 Sam. 17:38-39).

Earlier in the story David had shared with his fellow countrymen the reason for having no need of the armor. He said: The Lord who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine (17:37). His statement of faith suggests that as a young shepherd boy David had experienced God acting in his life with a nearness, goodness, and power that disarmed his biggest of fears. Whenever he went up against an attacking beast he experienced the rescuing presence of God being Almighty God with and for him. This faith disarmed his fear and kept him from being frozen with fright or from running away from his shepherding responsibilities.

So David removed his armor. Just as drugs, surgical procedures, and the best of technology cannot save us from deadly giants, neither can the best of human effort and skill. I learned this early on from one of my favorite childhood books, **Crybaby Calf** by Helen and Alf Evers. The story is about:

Hiram the farmer (who) was cheerful, even when a bee stung him.
Martha his wife (who) was cheerful,
even when she slipped and fell into the pond.
Jerry the horse (who) was cheerful,
even when he caught his tail in the door.
And the pigs (who) were cheerful-except when dinner was late.
But (mostly it was about) the Crybaby Calf (who) was NEVER cheerful.
He cried almost all the time.
In the summer he cried because it was hot-
And in the winter he cried because it was cold.
One day he cried so much that a pool of tears formed all around him.
It was so cold that the tears froze,
and the Crybaby Calf was stuck
fast to the ground!
Hiram the farmer tried to chop him free with a hatchet.
Martha his wife tried to melt him loose with a kettle of warm water.
Jerry the horse and Hiram the farmer pulled at the calf until they had
to stop, because it hurt--and that made the calf cry more than ever.
But when Hiram the farmer and Martha his wife got down on their
knees-And tried to melt the ice by blowing on it-They looked so funny-
That the Crybaby Calf stopped crying---and laughed.
He laughed so hard that he burst the ice all around him into little bits.
Then he jumped up on his feet and pranced away.
And after that the Crybaby Calf was cheerful.
He didn't cry when it was hot---He didn't cry when it was cold.
But for a long time afterward he ALWAYS cried-
When he sat down.

Now because David's faith in God ran deep in his bones---when Goliath tried to scare him with death by cursing him in the name of a Philistine god and began taunting him with: *Come to me and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field* (vs. 44). David stood firm in his faith in the Lord's saving power. David did not back down. David said to Goliath:

You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts . . . This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand . . . So that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly will know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear . . . (vs. 45-47).

But if not by sword and spear, then how does God save us in the giant storms of our lives? Whenever the followers of Jesus "feared a great fear" of the magnitude of David's Goliath, they told the story about the time Jesus fell asleep in the boat and didn't seem to care that the perfect storm was taking them down. When the winds arose and the waves beat over to swamp the boat, they cried to him,

"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mark 4:38b-41).

Who then is he? Who is this who sleeps in faith with the confidence of David before the storm? Who is this who stops the stormy chaos and calms frightened spirits with faith filled words? In one of his sermons

on Jesus' rebuke of the sea Rev. Frederick Buechner proclaimed this life saving faith: *"Christ sleeps in the deepest selves of all of us, and . . . in whatever way we can call on him as the fishermen did in their boat to come awake within us and to give courage, to give us hope, to show us each one our way. May he be with us especially when the winds go mad and the waves run wild, as they will for all of us before we're done, so that even in their midst we may find peace, find him"* (Secrets in the Dark: A life in Sermons).

In the Christian heart Jesus is our life saving teacher who taught us to call God, Abba Father. In the Daily Devotional, **Our Papa in Heaven**, author Martin B. Copenhaver wrote: *Martin Luther mused that Joseph must have been a wonderful father for Jesus to have chosen to address God as Father. (Luther also said that his relationship with his own father was so difficult that he couldn't address God as Father without shuddering.) But the term Jesus actually used is even more remarkable---Abba, which is an intimate term of endearment, more like "Papa," or "Daddy." The word comes from the gurgling sounds that an infant makes before she has learned to talk. It is the first "word" an infant utters . . . When Jesus addresses God as Abba it reflects the intimacy of his relationship with God, like an infant's close and trusting relationship with a nurturing parent. When Jesus calls God Abba it also makes clear that even before we have the right word---or any words at all--we have enough with which to approach God. Even our wordless gurgles or sighs too deep for words can be enough. That someone could have such a close relationship with God is remarkable. But the Apostle Paul goes on to affirm a still more remarkable truth: through Jesus, we are invited to have that kind of relationship with God as well. Not only is Jesus the Son of God but through him we are God's daughters and sons, and God is our Abba too* (June 12 UCC Stillspeaking Daily Devotional).

When we cry, "Abba, Father!" it is that very spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

So, beloved children of God, give it a try. Whenever you fear a great fear, get on your knees in prayer and cry "Abba, Father." Have faith. Then take heart by believing that God will rescue you from your fear and will renew your spirit with great courage and deep peace.