

5th Sunday after Pentecost – 24 June, 2018

David and Goliath

Before I comment on the David and Goliath story, on this day when I am marking twenty years of priestly, I want to say thank you to all of you at St Philip's for all your support and loving concern for me during my journey towards ordination in the Anglican Church. And for those of you who were not members of our parish when I first came here, I would like to briefly tell you why I feel so grateful to be part of our community.

It all started about 1990 when I was a building union official and experienced what I still choose to name a call to change the direction of my life. This experience also included me returning to the Anglican tradition.

I was living in Watson, and although I had been baptized, confirmed and married in an Anglican church, for over a decade I had been a member of the Society of Friends, Quakers - so I had to choose an Anglican church to go to.

I went to the three local churches on a Sunday afternoon with my eight year old twin daughters, and let them choose the church we would attend. It was St John's in Reid. Margaret liked the shape of it, and Laura liked the fishpond, so that is where I first learnt the ropes as a liturgical assistant. I enrolled at St Marks National Theological Centre and began my degree part-time.

After a couple of years at St John's, I had to choose a new parish as part of my training. I chose St Philip's – but only because someone I much admired recommended the Revd Doug Bannerman, the rector at the time.

It was Marie Arthur, the wife of Bishop Gordon Arthur, who was rector of our parish from 1973-74, after his retirement as bishop of Grafton. At first, I demurred because Doug was one of my lecturers and sometimes he forgot to come for a class! She persisted, her words were, "I think he will surprise you". I remember that it was early spring, as I had picked a branch of blossom hanging over the fence of the old garage that used to be next to our O'Connor shops. It was getting dark when I knocked on the rectory door and asked if I could be the next St Marks student at St Philips. Doug looked surprised, but he said yes, if it was OK with St Marks.

And Marie was right, I was surprised, and forever grateful. I learnt my altar table manners from him, was introduced to Joseph Campbell by him, and after a couple of years, received a glowing rector's report for when I went to the selection panel.

Unfortunately the person in charge of preparing candidates for ordination that year chose not to include Doug's report with my papers which the twelve members of the panel received before the candidates were interviewed.

I was not accepted the first time I went. Ask me another time and I will tell you the reason he gave me for not including Doug's report in my papers.

I went to the panel the following year, Doug's report was included, and I was accepted. Unfortunately, Bishop George would not ordain me to be deacon unless I had paid employment at St Philip's, even though many of you signed a petition saying you would like to have me with you as an honorary deacon.

So I was still waiting in the wings and feeling helpless and sorry for myself until the day I was in the kitchen of a member of our parish, Philida Sturgess Hoy. Neither of us can remember why I was there; we didn't know each other very well. Philida was one of the first bright young women to work in treasury, but she had not been working there for some years and, instead, when I called, was making a cake for the Sydney Easter show.

As I watched her, bewailing my fate, she looked up at me and said briskly, "Jeannette, I think you're dithering." Me, dithering. Never!!! However the next day I rang Bathurst Diocese to ask for an interview with the bishop, and afterwards I was deaconed and priested and had a wonderful ministry in rural parishes in central NSW, before returning to Canberra and St Philip's in 2003. Some of you even came to my deaconing in Bathurst. I hope my story shows you why I feel so indebted to, and part of, St Philips.

Now to our Old Testament story of David and Goliath and its link to Star Wars. I do not recall ever preaching on this story before. And neither has our rector. I've used it as a bible story for children, but until a couple of months ago always thought that there was nothing much to say about it for adults. We all know the story anyway. But do we really? I have certainly learnt a lot I didn't know before. Did you know that about two and half thousand years ago it was put together very carefully by the priests and others in charge of what went into the ancient manuscripts to show how David had all the qualities required of a king of Israel?

As a first year Student at St Marks I was shocked to learn just how much editing went on by priests and others to ensure the story of the Jewish faith was as they wanted it to be. And did you know, I didn't, until a couple of weeks ago, that while scholars generally believe that David did fight against a tall powerful philistine, it was not actually someone called Goliath, who is recorded in the second book of Samuel, chapter 21, verse 19 as being killed by Elhanan, one of David's warriors. The editors obviously thought the story was stronger by naming David's opponent Goliath of Gath. So they added the name here as well as recording his death by someone else later on. Is there that much difference between this kind of arranging and all the editing of film that must go on before any film is released?

Secondly, David is most certainly older than our traditional image of him being a young boy. When King Saul expresses concern about David's ability to beat the philistine, David boasts how he has dealt with bears and lions and killed them, pulling them away from his sheep with his bare hands. "Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God."

David is not a twelve year old as he is often depicted.

Rather what this story is designed to show, is that he is someone who has all the qualities required of a future king. He is intelligent, brave, resolute, ambitious and faith filled! He is also a very politically astute young man. Three times he asks what he will get if he kills the philistine, and what is he told?

The king will greatly enrich the man who kills him, he will get a princess bride, and his family will be able to live tax free. Worth going for, especially for the youngest son in a family of eight sons.

What I also learnt was that David's weapon of sling and stones was not simply a boyish toy. It was a standard item in the armory of professional soldiers of the time. I quote Judges 20:16 when the tribes of Israel were fighting the tribe of Benjamin – who as well as having 26,000 armed men also had 'seven hundred specially chosen men who were left-handed. Every one of them could sling a stone at a strand of hair and never miss.'(Good News Bible)

So the ancient sling is not to be confused with a modern slingshot or what we call a shanghie. The sling was whirled around to discharge its missile by centrifugal force. It was a deadly weapon.

And what of Joseph Campbell? (1904-1987) Why is he relevant to both stories and to Revd Doug Bannerman and myself?

Doug introduced us to Campbell's writings in a series of sermons. Campbell travelled widely to support his belief that from the beginning of time all cultures have created myths and stories to help them understand their own life experiences, and to give meaning to their lives.

Does it matter if the giant philistine was not called Goliath?

No, not really. Because the story is not really concerned with who he was, but rather it is about the seemingly weak confronting the powerful and winning. Such stories give us courage when we feel at a disadvantage, such stories help us to believe that anything is possible. In our time, remember the fall of the Berlin wall, and in these past seven days how the president of the most powerful nation on earth had to change his position on the policy of separating children from their parents of families illegally crossing the border of Mexico into the United States. He said it couldn't be done by executive order, but a

couple of days ago he did change it by executive order, after thousands of individuals expressed their overwhelming disapproval of the policy.

And finally to the link with Star Wars. Over forty years ago its creator, George Lucas, wanted to make a meaningful film for children, but he couldn't do it until he read Joseph Campbell's work and spent time with him and learnt from him the power and need for myth. This is not hearsay, George Lucas states it himself. Because of his involvement with Campbell he learnt how to make films which appealed to all ages about good and evil, about power and weakness, and courage, and resourcefulness, which have spoken to our need to find meaning in our lives for the last forty years

So what does the Star Wars franchise have that different Christian church traditions don't seem to have? Why did The Last Jedi on its opening weekend near Christmas earn over \$450,000,000 dollars world wide, but not including china? And why, almost certainly, did more families and young people go to see it than went to church on Christmas day?

I believe it is because its creators continue to have a deep awareness of the power and continuing relevance of a mythological story to help us understand and respond appropriately to the issues of our day. I dare to say that most of the Christian denominations have not kept up with our societies' advances in science and technology, so we are increasingly becoming irrelevant for people's everyday lives. For those of us who do care about, and believe in the reality of the spiritual energy of our planet, the challenge before us is to find the language and will to talk about our spirituality in our quantum universe. We need to create liturgies for our gatherings for worship so that they become not simply uplifting social occasions, but gatherings which align us with the extraordinary scientific advances in knowledge of our time.

Two years ago I spent a week in a women's Benedictine monastery on the edge of Lake Erie in the United States.

While I was there I saw this book in the library, Paradoxology - Spirituality in a Quantum Universe written by a Roman Catholic Medical Mission Sister, Miriam Therese Winter, who was professor of liturgy, worship, and spirituality at Hartford Seminary, Connecticut when it was published in 2009.

I bought it when I got home, but because the title and contents intimidated me, it remained unopened until early this year. Now I have read it, and it is exactly what I need to begin to meet the challenge of finding a spirituality for our quantum universe. No doubt I will want to share with you my new findings another day.

But for now I will close with two directives, one from Yoda of Star Wars, and the other from Miriam Therese Winter.

From Yoda:

Do or do not, there is no try.

And from Miriam :

Let go
of the need
to be secure,
of the urge to be
absolutely sure,
the luxury
of certainty,
as if
“as it were”
could ever be.
Worlds
within worlds
within subatomic entities,
worlds
beyond worlds,
galactic immensities,
give us a glimpse,
though never enough,
of quantum connectedness
and quantumstuff.
The mystery
we cannot see
in hidden fields
of energy,
that sumptuous
reality:
tantalizing, terrifying, mystifying, mesmerizing,
enticing us
to the very edge
of forever and ever.
Jump!

