

The Giant and the Storm **Matt Lehman Wiens**

We find ourselves in a world that storms. Every day, it seems that the flow of information points to an increasingly downward spiral for our planet and our society. Rising levels of carbon dioxide, flooding and drought, frequent conflicts, and political corruption all serve to deepen our sense of hopelessness.

In this storm, we gather together, hoping to find whatever shelter we can. From the bottom of the boat, we cry out to a God who, for all of the raging of the storm, seems to be sleeping. We pray for God to act, to stand before us, and proclaim to the storm “Quiet! Be still!”

But still, the storm rages. Still, the Savior sleeps.

Perhaps, though, God’s faithfulness comes through in ways that we don’t see it. Perhaps, in the midst of our despair, God is working in ways unseen.

If we really dig deep into the numbers, we find that the storm is beginning to lessen. According to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the number of children around the world who die before their fifth birthday has dropped from 11.2 million per year in 1990, to just over 5 million per year as of 2016.

Again, in 1990, 35% of the world was below the international poverty line of living on less than \$1.90 per day. Today, only 9% of the world lives in this state. And there’s more good news – all over the world, rates of maternal mortality are down, contraceptive use is up, and rates of death from HIV are dropping.

But still, every day we hear news that is trying to tell us the opposite, news that tries to tell us that God sleeps. Perhaps, as we become more and more plugged in to our devices, the intensity of the storm is not changing – it is our awareness of the storm that is changing. We as a church, as a community, as a nation, are becoming more and more aware of ways our world is rotten.

Civil war in Syria, conflict in Ukraine, genocide against the Rohingya, Saudi Arabia invading Yemen, abducted girls in the Congo, civil war in Somalia, murders in Central America, separation of children at the border, racial profiling and police violence, crimes against indigenous peoples – can we say with certainty that any of these stories would be at the level of our awareness a century ago? Can we say we’d be aware of them even 25 years ago?

And returning to those numbers from the Gates Foundation – there is still work to do! If the international poverty rate has dropped to 9%, that means 1 out of every 10 people still lives on less than \$1.90 a day. There are still 5 million children who die before their fifth birthday every year. And if our efforts to improve the world were to stop, how quickly would those numbers return to their 1990 levels, or beyond?

So now we stand, crying out to Christ, wake up! Do something! Where are you?

And just as he did in the boat, Jesus wakes, turns to us, and says “Why are you still afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

Similar to us, David was introduced to a crisis. He was given new information that made him view the problem in a different way. He knew that his country, Israel, was at war with the Philistines, but it was not until he traveled to the front lines that he saw the true problem - a problem that taunted Israel, its armies, and mocked Yahweh. His reaction to the situation gives us an example of what we must do.

David came upon the camp, not planning to go to battle. He was planning to provide supplies to his brothers, and return home. But when he heard the words of Goliath, he immediately began to search out more information, attempting to address the problem.

His passion for resolving the issue drew attention, however. His brother scorned him, believing that David thought too highly of himself. King Saul was willing to give him a chance, but only if David would fight using Saul’s methods. David rejected them both, choosing instead to use his skills, and to trust in God to accomplish what needed to be done.

God did not miraculously intervene to slay Goliath and defeat the Philistines. It was David, acting as God's messenger, as the hand of God, that achieved this result.

Today, I believe that we can still stand in awe of our God. We can still look back at history, at the history of our lives, and see the ways that God has intervened, and that God has stayed faithful. However, our relationship to God is just that – a relationship. Like any relationship, our interactions need to be mutual. God's history of faithfulness and action does not entitle us to cower in the bottom of the boat, waiting for Jesus to wake up, and calm the storm.

Instead, God's relationship with us is the very reason that we must act now. Like David, we must go to our leaders, and say "I will be the one to do this." And like David, we will face resistance. There will be those who tell us that we think too highly of ourselves, or that we aren't equipped for the job we're trying to do.

We see these attitudes yet today. When people protested the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, they were characterized as violent, as looters, as disturbers of the peace. When Martin Luther King Jr. called for a better society, he was harassed by the FBI, mocked by others, and eventually assassinated. As our country listens to the terrified voices of immigrant children, there are those who only care that their parents broke the law, and are being punished accordingly. When the teenagers from Parkland stood up to say that violence is wrong, to call on our lawmakers to prevent another school shooting, they were told that they didn't know anything, that they were too young to have a voice. Still, they have persisted. Although we are told over and over again that the change we want is not feasible, we must still act.

Ultimately, we must reject the way that the world does things, and trust in God to use our skills and our talents to act in the way that God wants us to.

However, just as our relationship with God calls us to act with faith, our dedication to the way of Christ calls us to act with love. It would be all too easy to try to solve every problem we face with a sling and five smooth stones. At times, when we are faced with violence, the way of peaceful action seems to be the least secure, the least effective, and certainly, the least desirable. But Christ reminds us to be not afraid, and have faith, for He has overcome the world.

When we have faith, when we have love, we must act.

When we have faith, when we have love, we shall not be afraid.