

# Reflection on 23 June 2024

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*Readings: 1 Samuel 17. 32-49 & Mark 4. 35 – 41*

### God of Surprises

Life! Life is full of surprises. That's my reflection for this morning. Life is full of surprises, take it from me, it's God's will, get used to it. Amen.

That surprised you, didn't it?

Seriously, God's will has a way of surprising people. We heard about two groups of people in this morning's readings [1 Samuel 17. 32-49, David and Goliath; Mark 4. 35 – 41, Jesus calms the storm] who were surprised.

First of all, the Philistines. They have a champion warrior. Bold as brass he keeps taunting the Israelites: Common on, send someone to fight me; who have you got? Oh, a little shepherd boy, ha ha. I'll turn him into mincemeat.

And then he's dead, hit on the head by a pebble. Goliath is surely surprised. The Philistine army is surprised and turns tail and flees. God's will triumphs.

And then we get the story of the Disciples in the boat. A storm brews up. Sheets of rain pour down, waves crash over the side of the boat; the boat fills with water... and Jesus is asleep on a cushion. The Disciples are surprised – first that Jesus doesn't wake up despite the hullabaloo of the raging wind and rain and, second, when he does wake up, he just goes CALM and the storm settles down. *Who is this man?*

These, of course, are not the only stories in the Bible where people are surprised.

Let's start at the beginning.

I bet Adam was surprised when he met God walking in the Garden of Eden after he'd eaten the forbidden fruit. *Adam, did you eat the apple? Er... yes, but I didn't pick it, that was her.* And Eve says: *Ah, yes but it was him, the snake, he made me do it.* But God - loving, patient, forgiving God, says: *too bad, one strike and you're out. You're banned from this garden for ever, you'll never get your ball back.* I bet that was a huge surprise to Adam and Eve. But I'll come back to that in a minute.

There are other stories. Take Jonah. I love the story of Jonah. God tells him to go to Nineveh to correct the wrongdoers there and Jonah refuses and runs away on a boat. And a big storm brews up (God likes creating storms in our lives) and Jonah gets thrown overboard and thinks he's going to die. But a big whale comes along and swallows him up for three days and then, at God's will, spews him out onto dry land not far from – guess where? – Ninevah. What a surprise.

But the best surprise of all is when Mary says: *Joseph, sit down, we need to talk; I'm pregnant.* Well, it didn't quite happen like that, of course. We know that God pre-warned them in advance, but I bet they were both surprised when the Angel Gabriel told them that Mary would soon give birth to a son.

Jesus surprised the local church people by eating with sinners and tax collectors. He surprised everyone when he said to the most hopeless sinners: *Your sins are forgiven.* He surprised his disciples with parables about the kingdom of God that emphasised that it is the small and the least in the kingdom who are the greatest.

And that is the biggest surprise of all about the faith of Christianity – that even though I, and maybe you, keep on doing things that hurt God and make him sad, even though we are selfish and inconsiderate more times than we care to admit, surprise of all surprises, God keeps on loving us and pointing us in the right direction, even though we don't recognise it all the time, even though we sometimes feel like Jonah being tossed into the stormy waters.

I've come to realise over the years that God likes to surprise us. We find ourselves in situations that we didn't plan for; we find ourselves talking to people who say surprising things; we lose our jobs, we have relationship breakdowns, we wander into a church by chance and 12 years later find ourselves talking to the congregation about surprises.

We might think that we know what's best for us and our lives and for the world and for God's purpose, but usually we're following our own agenda and not God's. We are looking at the world from our small corner, he sees it with the eyes of eternity and that makes a big difference!

If David hadn't killed Goliath, the Philistines would have overrun the Israelites and changed the course of history. If Jesus hadn't been woken up and if he hadn't quelled the storm, the faith of the new Disciples would have been weaker. Taking the story literally, if Adam and Eve hadn't been banned from the playground, they wouldn't have had children and then where would we be?

So, surprises are a big part of God's world and his plans. And how should we cope with God's surprises? Go with flow, have faith that God has surprised you for a reason; he is on your side, as he was with David, Jonah, Mary and Joseph, and everything is going to turn out for the best in the long term. Surprises can be invigorating and change your life for the better. Coping with God's surprises; accepting God's surprises, will usually, ultimately, make you stronger.

Life. Life is full of surprises. Amen for that.

