

The bride and groom, still tired from the emotional pitch of the wedding the day before, were on the darkened airplane. As is so often the case, the transatlantic flight left shortly before midnight. In the morning they would awaken as they landed at the Milan airport. The plane was half full, so the bride could curl on her side and rest her head in the lap of her new husband and sleep. She was awakened a few hours into the journey. They had encountered turbulence, the captain announced. This pilot must be a master of understatement, she thought. Although she had traveled a great deal, she had never experienced anything like this. The plane was pitching wildly, periodically dropping in a way that made her stomach jump up into her throat. It seemed like this silver bird that was supposed to be winging them smoothly to their honeymoon was being twisted by great hands, as if it were Sunday's chicken with its neck being snapped by some great farmer's wife in the heavens. The overhead bins responded to the torque by popping open, and jackets and tote bags began to rain down on the seated passengers. One or two began to stand, to shut the bins, and the flight attendants announced sharply, "You must remain in your seat. It is unsafe to stand up with this turbulence." The bride lay curled up, eyes wide as the plane seemed to twist and shudder, thinking, "God, why are you doing this? I finally found the perfect husband, and now we're going to die in the Atlantic before I even get a chance to enjoy being married to him." Her husband, sensing her anxiety, patted her gently, but said nothing. There was nothing to say. They could only keep riding through the air on this bucking bronco of a 757, hoping and praying that things would get better. The bride found herself thinking of the pilot, and wondering if he was praying as she was, or if this was not as frightening to him. Perhaps he had gone through this kind of turbulence before. Perhaps he had studied the construction of the plane and its systems so thoroughly that he knew that it was built to withstand what was happening. Perhaps he simply trusted in the plan, in God, in his extensive training. And as she thought these things, a strange calm came over her. There was nothing to do but to pray and to trust. And in a little while, the ride smoothed out to the usual near-imperceptible floating forward sensation that she was familiar with on plane rides, and she dozed off again. They were safe.

Trust. How do we get it? How do we hold on to it, when all the signals say there is no reason to trust?

Sometimes we trust because we are too stupid to know that we should not. We might be tempted to say that about David as he faced Goliath. He was just a boy, probably a preteen. The sum of his battle experience was chasing off the wild animals who threatened his father's sheep. And Goliath, this champion of the King of the Philistines, this man who demanded the ancient tradition of one representative from each side to fight to decide the battle, was almost 10 feet tall. But David volunteered to fight Goliath, one on one. Little David, a shepherd. Perhaps he was barely five feet tall. The passage notes how handsome and ruddy he was, not how tall and muscular he was. One on one hand to hand combat. Did David volunteer because he was too stupid to realize how outmatched he was? Or was there something else going on here, a well of trust that God would make sure he not only survived but overcame the enemy? On the face of it, it was a ridiculous matchup. And King Saul realized that. He tried to get David to put on Saul's own armor and carry the king's weapons, but it was clear that David was a lot smaller than the king, so he tossed the protective garments and weapons aside, saying they were much too big for him, and he wasn't used to them. He faced the might of the enemy with no more than a slingshot and five smooth stones. Goliath tried a little trash talk, to make the boy nervous. But David was not to be intimidated. He trusted that God would help him, and he ran toward the line of battle, pulled back on the slingshot and felled the ten-foot tall Philistine champion with a single stone. The arrogance of youth or the trust borne of a deep faith that God would do what was necessary? Samuel's account of the battle certainly argues for the latter.

But sometimes in the midst of battle, in the midst of frightening circumstances that clearly seem to portend our doom, we feel the trust draining out between our shaking fingers like cold water. We don't immediately sense God with us, and we panic. We abandon trust because trusting in such circumstances defies what we see and hear and feel with our own senses. We become like the apostles in the little boat with Jesus out on the Sea of Galilee. The storm has whipped up a terrible wind and waves, and we are quite certain that the boat will be swamped and we will drown. And through it all, Jesus is asleep. How can he sleep through this storm? He's supposed to take care of the disciples, and they are more than a little upset as he snores away at the back of the boat. So they wake him up: "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He looks up, sees what is happening, sees the disciples' distress, and commands the wind and the waves to cease...and suddenly all is still. He sees that their trust is almost shattered. Almost. They have, after all, awoken him. If they truly did not believe in him, that would have been a pointless exercise. So he attends to their needs

by calming the storm. Note that he doesn't start out by chastising them that they are weak in their faith and trust. No, he fixes the problem at hand, like a parent with a child with night terrors, soothing them until they are calm again. Only then does he say, "I thought you understood that I would not abandon you. When you are going to truly and completely trust me?"

In these two stories, I'm reminded once again that the people that God chooses – David, the disciples in the boat – are the ones who most need to trust. Had the Lord told Samuel to anoint the eldest son, Eliab, the one who already had his father's birthright and blessing, the tall and handsome lad who was most likely everyone's favorite, the young man would have sailed into kingship with no doubts, no worries, no struggles...and no need to reach out to the Lord saying "I need you and I trust you to be there for me."

If Jesus had chosen a King or a Pharisee to be His apostle, a person with privilege and power and status, that person would have assumed that he was called into this role because of his own gifts and power or position rather than because of God's grace. That person would have felt no need to reach out to Jesus and say "I need you and I trust you to be there for me." In a boat in the Sea of Galilee, a king would have had an entourage in a following boat who would respond to his command. A Pharisee would have quoted how this was the result of breaking a law. Neither would have placed his trust in the only One who truly deserves our trust.

No, God had Samuel anoint David, the youngest, least favored one. The son who didn't even merit being paraded before Samuel when he visited Jesse's house. And he became the one who slew the Philistine giant, who became a great albeit very human king of Israel.

The Lord chose the disciples, ordinary fishermen and working folk. The ones whose names were not engraved in stone over a lintel, who were not even the best-known in their own communities. And they became the ones who were the mighty voices telling the story of the Son of God and his new covenant with all of us.

All because they were people who needed to trust something and someone larger than themselves. We all need to trust. Sometimes it is difficult. Sometimes our trust falters. But our faith in the One who is the giver of all strength and comfort and truth leads us back, again and again, to the place of trust.

As the Psalmist reminds us, "Those who know your Name will put their trust in you, for you never forsake those who seek you, O LORD." It's good not to forget that, in a boat, in an airplane, or when facing down the giants that challenge us. God never forsakes those who seek the Lord.

Amen.