For David, facing the Philistine giant, the poem from David Whyte, the Truelove – which is really about another story of Jesus on the lake in a storm, the walking on water story – but one which also speaks to the theme I want to explore today. And Jesus facing that storm in a boat on Lake Galilee.

Our texts look at people being confronted with the worst threat they could imagine. These stories invite us to reflect on how we respond to threatening giants and storms, how we respond to our fears, when they threaten to overpower us. Both stories tell of people facing fright and terror with calm, and with trust.

Trust is a mysterious aspect of our humanity. How do we learn to trust? How is trust regained when it has been lost?

Seriously abused children who have been rescued and placed in adoptive families take a long time to regain trust in adults. Researchers in the UK used a story to try to understand the thinking of abused children who have learned to trust and those who remain untrusting.

A psychotherapist in the study said: ‘One of the first stories we used is about spilt juice. We describe how the mum pours out juice for the family, but the son spills his on to the table. She says, "Oh no, John has spilt his juice." And then the child is asked ‘what happens next?’

‘One child who had managed to adapt well to her new life said the mother would say “Come and help me clean it up”, and they would do that together, even though the mum was cross.

‘But another child said the boy would take the jug and empty it over the mother’s head. One boy finished the story by saying the child would be put in jail and another said the whole house would end up on fire, as the table was close to the oven.’

These responses revealed a catastrophic way of thinking that shows the child finds it extremely difficult to trust or rely on adults and has not yet found a sensible way of solving dilemmas. The positive result of the study was that, when the children who had been placed in loving families were questioned a year and two years later, the stories became increasingly less fearful and chaotic and the children demonstrated trust in the adults. Trust is essential to survival and thriving because to be human is to be in relation.

The biblical stories invite hearers to trust in God, to trust in life.

In the Hebrew bible story of David and Goliath the priorities and realities of God are shown to be not the obvious ones valued by the dominant society.
As a story for us, it still has major limitations. It supports a violent resolution to differences and it fails to address the call of Jesus that we love our enemies. However, in its time, it would have moved its hearers to question dominant wisdom. We can appreciate it as a stage in the development of Jewish thought, a stage that Jesus and his contemporaries took much further. Even so, here are seeds of a new way of understanding enemies here:

- military might is not supreme
- notions of appropriate leadership and the power needed to sustain it are turned upside down
- God’s way contradicts conventional wisdom.
- the usual order of the powerful over the weak, the large over the small, the old over the young has been reversed
- the hopeless have their hope renewed

Through the story the character of David is portrayed as calm, displaying a quiet confidence that he knows what to do in the situation - drawing on his experience of protecting his stock from wild animals - trusting that YHWH is with him and that it is YHWH’s will that he do what is needed.

David’s calm and trust are contagious. When the Israelites see that he has brought down the giant, the calm overcomes the Israelites too.

The story of David and Goliath is often told as a story about less powerful individuals or groups taking on institutions of power. Ghandi versus the British Empire. Erin Brokovich versus the multinational insurance company. Oscar Romero versus the Salvatorian Government. These are great stories and these people are heroes.

But I think that the stories can also speak to our personal lives. Goliath can be our eternal fear and anxiety. To qualify as a Goliath, a fear must be like a monster that is terrifying and overpowering. In fact, for most of us, by the time we are adults we manage to avoid facing our inner fears so successfully that we don’t even know what we are afraid of – until the moment comes when confrontation is unavoidable.

Can you think, for a moment, about what it is that you fear – and let the story of David and Goliath speak to it?

The Gospel story of Jesus calming the storm, also tells of fears being faced with trust.

After preaching the series of parables, Jesus asks his disciples to take him across the lake to get away from the crowd that is following him.

The lake, while familiar to these experienced boatmen and fishermen, was still unpredictable, and something always to be respected and feared.

On this evening, it shows its full force as a sudden wind blows up, the waves almost swamping the boat.
Jesus, protected in the stern of the boat, is asleep, probably covered up and with his head lying on the pillow, oblivious.

Finally, in despair the disciples wake him up.

“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” they say, showing their fear, and perhaps their frustration.

Jesus awakens, and as if the wind were a spirit, he rebukes it. They wind obeys. There is calm.

The disciples are astounded at Jesus mastery of nature. He is astounded at their lack of faith.

The literal truth of these stories is not the point. They were written down because of the truths they point to in the human condition.

These stories help us realize that divine energy does not usually remove storms from our lives, but rather helps us to face them.

Trusting like that enables us to be calm, to have courage and hope.

The readings remind us that, like David, people have the spiritual resources within themselves and from their cultural and religious heritage to deal with the fears they face.

David didn’t need the armour offered by Saul. But he, like us had innate gifts and abilities of being human.

Unarmoured, God can work through us when we are free to be ourselves.

Though I believe we have the potential to live like this, many of us don’t.

Many of us live limited and afraid, living with our secret fears and insecurities, especially in many of us, of self-doubt. Even those of us who, on the surface, seem confident and successful often struggle with that.

So - how can trust be nurtured? How does trust in God and in others develop?

Trust is developmentally normal, but it is fragile. Babies are born with an instinct to trust. The instinct to attach to the mother’s breast to suckle. To nestle in, to expect protection.

But trust only grows if needs are met. It is easily lost through neglect or abuse, as we saw in the children’s responses to the spilt juice story.

Trust, I think, is an orientation of expectation of care. It doesn’t depend on an expectation of everything always working out the way we hope.

Trust can be maintained when things are difficult and challenging and unfair - even in situations of violence, as long as the person is not left alone and unsupported.

For trust to grow, we need the experience of solidarity, of “standing with”, of helping one another to face the storms.
For me, the community of church reminds us that we shouldn’t limit the nurturing of trust to biological family. Trust needs wider community too.

Sometimes birth and marital families fail terribly. Sometimes too much pressure is placed on family and it’s more than can be sustained.

Friendship relationships become crucial. Even when families are strong, we need to create community beyond family

Trust is built when people have the experience of being accompanied, with compassion, through life’s journey.

In churches we have called this pastoral care. Pastoral care is a communal art, bringing laity and clergy together to offer ministries of transforming care to one another and to those outside the boundaries of their congregations.

We conspire and collaborate with others to bring forth new life and hope from the creative tensions of living.

It can happen in many places.

- at morning tea;
- in a phone call;
- in a conversation over a meal;
- in a visit to a home or hospital; in a card sent in a time of crisis;
- in creating an environment where children are equal and full members in our community

Part of my motivation in planning for worship each week involves my desire to care for you all in this gathered community.

It also happens in every moment and place where you indicate to another human being, where you live or work or play, that you are there for them, that you are willing to listen.

One of the contributions that feminist theology has made to our understanding of care and community is that care is mutual – can be – mutual. We do not dispense care to those whose lives are less together than our own.

Mutuality is the capacity to affect and be affected by another human being. It’s not about fixing it for others, but about listening rather than offering advice.

For me, one of the appealing things about referring to those people who have recognised caring roles in the congregation, referring to them as Pastoral Friends rather than as Elders, is that it has a sense of mutuality.

The gospel happens when we are open to relationship with each other.

Indian theologian DT Niles once said that Christianity is one beggar showing another beggar where to find food.
No one of us is without problems and fears and self-doubt.

We enter a pastoral conversation or situation knowing that we too need grace, fully aware of our own humanity - and that what we have to offer of ourselves comes from this starting point.

Authentic, trust building pastoral care doesn’t create dependency or reinforce isolation. Its goal is the creation of community, building up relationships.

And it’s linked to our struggle for justice. Growing in trust builds up in the people willing to take on the forces of violence and injustice that seem bigger than we are.

Trust that helps to keep us still and centred when we are faced with fearful situations is needed in the work of justice.

This community becomes a place where we can ask each other “what is life about?” ”Where is the sacred?” Where we can help one another to answer that question asked of Jesus “don’t you care?”

Jesus knew and trusted God’s care – and we can invite one another into that understanding. Our task it to nurture one another so deeply, so radically that we too are in no doubt that God cares.

Of course, it’s really important to say this on any Sunday when we are reflecting about the church – that we will not do this perfectly. We are human, we will fail and we will disappoint each other.

But the underlying experience of seeing sacred love in the love of community and friends, in lovers, in family, in church, enables us to take that love beyond ourselves into the lives of all we meet along the way.

David trusted that Yahweh would listen.

Trust is fundamental in fronting our fears. Because this is where fear attacks us. It tells us that we are on our own. That there are no winds at our back.

We avoid, we deny, we rationalise – and it’s all fear!

Each of us must make a fundamental choice sometime in our life. Is the universe for us – or against us?

If it’s for us, and if were ready to confront our Goliaths, God is with us.

It doesn’t mean that everything works out well. But the life of faith consists of stepping into life with the fundamental conviction that something is at work – something that is for life, for love, for goodness.

Think of Jesus in the poem: stepping out of the boat, you find your support only after you’ve take your first step.
There is a faith in loving fiercely
the one who is rightfully yours
especially if you have
waited years and especially
if part of you never believed
you could deserve this
loved and beckoning hand
held out to you this way.

I am thinking of faith now
and the testaments of loneliness
and what we feel we are
worthy of in this world.

Years ago in the Hebrides
I remember an old man
who walked every morning
on the grey stones
to the shore of baying seals

who would press his hat
to his chest in the blustering
salt wind and say his prayer
to the turbulent Jesus
hidden in the water

and I think of the story
of the storm and everyone
waking and seeing
the distant
yet familiar figure
far across the water
calling to them

and how we are all
preparing for that
abrupt waking,
and that calling,
and that moment
we have to say yes,
except it will
not come so grandly
so Biblically
but more subtly
and intimately in the face
of the one you know
you have to love

so that when
we finally step out of the boat
toward them, we find
everything holds
us, and everything confirms
our courage, and if you wanted
to drown you could,
but you don’t
because finally
after all this struggle
and all these years
you don’t want to any more
you’ve simply had enough
of drowning
and you want to live and you
want to love and you will
walk across any territory
and any darkness
however fluid and however
dangerous to take the
one hand you know
belongs in yours.