I once knew a family of devout atheists who liked to prod me gently about religion. They were very smart and they usually got the better of me. But once I got the better of them, and they knew it. They told me proudly that they refused to have the Bible in their house—because there were so many bad things in it—contradictions, justification for slavery, condemnation of alternative lifestyles—the usual suspects. And I said yes, true enough, but it also has the story of David and Goliath. And even if it did not also contain the story of the prodigal son, and of the lost sheep, and the 27th Psalm, and the prophecies of late Isaiah, and the Sermon on the Mount, and the Magnificat, and all of those things that more than outweigh all the bad things—it has the story of David and Goliath. The story that says might does not make right, and that the little one who is good will, sooner or later, take down the giant who is evil.

My friends remained firmly outside the walls of religion. But when I said what I said there was a very surprising hush in that wonderfully eloquent household. I let it drop. But I can assure you: some weeks later, I caught sight of something on their bookshelves that made me shiver. “David and Goliath” has always, ever since memories begin for me, been important. And I don’t care if you are an atheist, a Hindu, a Christian, or a Scientologist—if you keep children from that story, you are keeping them from one of the treasures of childhood. That story belongs not to us but to humankind, and here’s why.

At one point in your life, every grownup was six cubits and a span in height. And every adult had overwhelming power. And if you were fortunate you lived with ones who were kind and benevolent. But even if you did, you met sooner or later with adults who were unkind and evil.

The story of David and Goliath is there to assure all children that there is someone who is bigger still than any unkind grown up, any bully, any monster, any fear. And that someone can put the power that makes the world spin into the hands of a shepherd boy. Do I think therefore this is a true story about David? No, I don’t. But I don’t think that matters. I think it’s a folk story that got associated with David. But I think it is a true story about God.

And what a perfect story for this particular day in June.
A friend of mine was bemoaning the commercialization of the Pride Parade the other day. He is a native New Yorker, and he tells me he first marched in the parade in 1973, just after he graduated from his Catholic High School. Back then, he says, the event was much more gritty and serious. People chanted militant things along the way, it was much more dangerous, and it also was went the other direction—from Christopher Street all the way up to 82\textsuperscript{nd}. I didn’t quite follow why that was so important but his main point I understood entirely. Above all, he says, back then nobody called it a "parade." Back then it was a "march."

Well, I certainly can see the point of his critique. It is always a bit of a shame when people cash in on an event with a deep ethical purpose. To paraphrase Jesus, the rich we shall always have with us, I suppose. What was once a challenge, something defiant, has become a media event. It is much lighter in weight. All of the above.

But as he spoke, I thought about what another friend said to me last year: that he much prefers the more celebratory, light-hearted feel. The inclusiveness. The festival feeling—and people of faith take festivals seriously. This friend told me the march back then was something necessary but awfully grim. The parade today is something positive, something one enjoys, rather than endures.

So my answer to the critical friend was this: you have a very good point. But you may be overlooking the most important thing of all. A march is something that leads you into battle. A parade happens after the battle has been won. That is a seismic shift.

Granted, no liberation movement will ever be fully victorious and complete in this life. But the victory does not have to be complete to call for a parade—just a substantial and palpable progress.

(And by the way—in 1973, I understand, the Church was not part of the parade. Now the Diocese of New York has its own—our own—quite visible contingent. I, myself, take pride in that.)

We are also celebrating Holy Baptism this morning. That too is mightily festive. As I always point out, Baptism is one of the elements of our faith that has also gone through a seismic shift in paradigm: the Baptisms I witnessed in the first half of my life were small, dank, and grim affairs. The emphasis was on sin: as this prayer from the former BCP suggests:

“IT is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should give thanks unto thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Al-mighty, Everlasting God, for that thy dearly beloved Son Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of our sins, did shed out of his most precious side both water and blood; and gave commandment to his disciples, that they should go teach all nations, and baptize them In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Regard, we beseech thee, the supplications of thy congregation; sanctify this Water to the mystical washing away of sin; and grant that this Child (this thy Servant), now to be baptized therein, may receive the fulness of thy grace, and ever remain in the number of
thy faithful children; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory, now and evermore. Amen.”

Compare that with what you will hear in a few moments.

Or put it this way. In a few minutes Bishop Andrew will invite the children to come down to the Font and witness something happy; it is hard to imagine someone saying, come children, and witness the washing away of sin.

Now this change has been criticized by well-intentioned people who feel that the seriousness of it all has been lost. They think the gloom is appropriate. One once told me he missed the penitential flavor of the whole former PB. But they are looking at things through the secular lens.

You see, the secular world believes festivity is mere relaxation, a mere break from the hardness of realities. It is frivolous, and religion is not frivolous. That posture I think is borrowed from Puritanism, which casts a very large, and very murky, shadow across our culture.

But our faith disagrees. People of faith take festivity seriously. There is a short but brightly-lit book by one of my teachers, Josef Pieper, called In Tune with the World: a Theory of Festivity. I get to force students to read it; they all end up liking it very much. I can’t assign it to you but I urge you to read it as well.

It is about a deeply Christian question: what, and or who, exactly is a human being? The biological answer of course is "the intelligent one," homo sapiens. Some sharp anthropologists have said, no, it’s homo faber—"man the tool-maker," the human as craftsperson. A darker, but also valid, point some ethicists have made is that we are homo necans—the killer people, man the destroyer, and they have—sorry to say—plenty of evidence for that view from fracking to capital punishment. And the great Jan Huizinga made the case that we are homo ludens—we are the playful primate, the only ape who makes a science of games.

I think all of these hold a piece of the truth. But none of them, for me, really answer the question. That is, "What is a human being?" Pieper’s In Tune with the World offers this: we are the festivans primate, we are the creature that makes festivity our response to the world, to the cosmos, to God, to life itself.

Now if you are like me, you may be asking yourself, "But what about all the very real misery and suffering and pain? How can we respond to the world with celebration when there is so much of that in it?"

Good Christian question. Pieper gives a long and thoughtful answer which I hope you’ll discover for yourself. But our Gospel story this Lord’s Day supplies the Christian answer to this Christian question. It is the story of the calming of the sea, and it is – well, actually it is my third example of the seismic shift our faith has enjoyed in our lifetimes.
When I began to study Scripture I noticed very soon that stories like this—the miracle stories—were assumed by the scholars to be folk-tales that had somehow gathered around the figure of Jesus. In other words, that this story is one like David and Goliath—good theme, but not true. These folk narratives had been developed by the First Church to express symbolically their convictions about him.

In other words they were really fiction. Jesus did not really heal lepers, deaf people, the blind. He did not really feed multitudes with minimal supplies of food. He did not literally walk on water. He did not literally raise the dead child or his dead friend. And so on and on. Ad tedium. And of course he didn’t really command the storm to be silent and the waves to calm down. What really happened was, maybe, there was a storm at sea and he prayed and urged everyone to have faith.

You see, everybody knows miracles do not, cannot, happen. Only Fundamentalists think they do.

This rational explaining of things is still taught in seminaries and university courses in the Bible. And I’m sure it, too, has a grain of truth in it. But the fact is, it’s also starting to sound a little stale and a little lame and a little—old-fashioned. To me, in fact, it sounds very 18th century. As our Presiding Bishop puts it, it is using a, 18th century model in the 21st century. It was back then that a very decent and very bright thinker, David Hume, announced that there was no miracle ever reported that couldn’t be explained in some natural way—mass hypnosis, say, for the feeding of the multitude, hysterical suggestion, for the deaf and the lame who seemed to be healed, freak coincidence for the walking on water, plain old exaggeration for the raising of the dead child.

That was very bold stuff in the credulous 1700s, but it’s pretty rusty today.

More and more theologians, scholars, and people of science are finding it much better to confront these stories at face value, as in your face, and let them do their work upon our closed and quaint minds. St Irenaeus says faith is the great hypothesis—and many are rediscovering his wisdom. Rather than assuming this could not happen, ask yourself, what would it mean if it did? What if, contrary to common sense and ordinary experience and the laws of science in their 18th century version, someone did any one of these things? What if a man really were to say "Be still," and the waves obeyed him?

I like to say the Bible is more powerful by far when it raises such questions than when it dispenses answers. And if that really did happen, the question it would raise is simply the very one the disciples, in fear now not of storms but of their companion, raised: who is this? That even the wind and sea obey him?

I have been speaking about three matters that seem to three separate issues—one concerning ethics, one worship, and one belief. But they are not separate. They are part of a startling and wonderful re-invention of our religion. Ethics is no longer a matter of searching Scripture for laws and rules. It is a matter of discerning the dynamic of God’s love sweeping through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and responding to that love.
creatively in the way we view, treat, and welcome others. Baptism is no longer a precious little ceremony we reflexively arrange for newborns, nor an insurance policy for their little souls, but a sacramental microcosm of creation, salvation, and incorporation into the true Royal Priesthood. And faith is neither swallowing incredible stories with mindless credulity, nor dismissing them with smug rationality. Faith is opening heart mind and spirit to the possibilities of the transcendent.

And that–every bit of that–is worth celebrating.

And you know, to come full circle–maybe there is more to that story of David and Goliath than folk tale.