

Epiphany Sunday
Fearless: Not Good Enough - Gideon

God saw Gideon as a mighty warrior. Gideon saw himself as weak and one of the least. What are some of the beliefs about yourself that God is helping you overcome? What has fear kept you from doing that God wants you to do? What are you going to do about it?



January 11, 2009

Judges 6: 1-4, 11-15 (NIV)

Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior." "But sir," Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian." The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" "But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

Reflections

Gideon is alone, threshing wheat. He works in the confines of his winepress, fearing a Midianite raid. All around him, people have forsaken the God who took them out of Egypt. They worship false gods of their neighbors and suffer horrific oppression at the hands of the Midianites. Perhaps he nurses anger, perhaps also fear. But then God appears and issues a call: "Go...and save Israel out of Midian's hand."

Our historical perspective let's us see Gideon as a Bible hero. He wins a total victory over Midian, one that Isaiah himself recalls, linking "unto us a child is born" with, "as in the Day of Midian." (Is. 9:4). But what's Gideon's first response? Basically, "Not me." Weakest member, weakest clan, weakest tribe (Vs. 15) ...*you've got the wrong*

guy. Almost comical, at least in view of who he's talking to!

And yet...can we not relate to what he feels here, to the fear and doubt that lead him to, "This is too big. I cannot possibly do this."? We all face fears. Sometimes – when a child is sick, we lose our job, face our own death – what lies out there (or inside!) overwhelms, and "Not me" is not an option. How does Gideon get from "Not me" to "Bible hero"? How do we get from paralyzing fear to moving forward?

Look at God's next words (vs. 16): "I will be with you," and you will accomplish this thing. Of course *you* can't do it. That was never the idea. But I will be with you. Where have we heard this before? Well, there's the season just past: this is nothing less than the meaning of Emmanuel — *God with us.* Does Gideon

"get it" right away? (Do we?) No. Reading on we find discussion, even "experiments," where God slowly brings Gideon to trust him. But He does, and Gideon emerges as a great leader and a people is freed.

So what's the point? We speak of courage: moving forward in the face of fear. But it is not courage that hangs on to, "I will be with you." It's faith. Faith moves forward when even courage isn't enough, in the conviction that God is with us. Where is God working with you now? Where might He be asking you to take a step where "Not me" doesn't work and courage isn't enough, but where what's needed is faith that He is with you? He was with Gideon in such a step. He is with us too. We have His promise: He is Emmanuel.

— *Bob Henderson*

Readings

Sunday, January 11 – Preparation: Remembering God’s mighty acts. Psalm 71:1-7, 14-17

The story of Gideon is one of many that can strengthen our resolve. As we prepare to work through the story, consider how the Psalmist grounds his personal hope in the memory of God’s works. Let the Psalm be a prayer for the week ahead.

Monday, January 12 – God starts his move. Judges 6:7-12, Exodus 3:1-4, Luke 1:8-13, 26-28

It seems like every time God makes a serious move, God himself or one of his angels appears to get the ball rolling. How – in ways less dramatic – might God show himself to us, when we face a serious need? Where has he done that with you?

Tuesday, January 13 – If God is with us, why...? Judges 6:12-14, Isaiah 63:13-64:1

Gideon is nothing if not passionate about the plight of Israel. Isaiah too lays a passionate appeal before the Lord. Where in your life might you have felt that God is not responding to desperate need? How might the pleas of Gideon and others actually point to comfort?

Wednesday, January 14 – But you can’t mean me. Judges 6:14-16, Exodus 3:9-12, 4:8-15.

The original hearers of Gideon’s story can not have missed the parallel to Moses. Moses is even more direct than Gideon: “Lord, please send someone else” (Ex. 4:13). How can it be that God chooses servants who feel so desperately inadequate? How might these episodes strengthen us in work to which we are called?

Thursday, January 15 – Give me a sign. Judges 6:17-22, 36-40; Ex. 3:12; Luke 1:18-20, 39-45

Gideon asks for a sign. He certainly stands in the tradition of Moses, and God later gives signs to Zechariah and Mary. What signs do we have of God’s love? Of his faithfulness? How might what we have seen and heard help us to trust when facing a problem? Even when we don’t feel Him near?

Friday, January 16 – Is this all I get to use? Judges 7:1-7; 2 Co 12:7-10

Gideon sets out with a pretty big army, but God reduces it almost 100-fold – to only 300 men! What is he doing!? Ponder Judges 7:2, and then Paul’s understanding in 2 Corinthians. Where in your life might weakness open the door to God’s working? What might it take to let that happen?

Saturday, January 17 – A triumph still remembered. Judges 7:19-23, 8:28; Is 9:1-7

Thus is Midian subdued, and some 700 years later, Isaiah ties this mighty victory to “the zeal of the Lord of Hosts” 9:7, and says there are greater things to come. What victories has God accomplished in your life? Where do you need a victory now? Time to pray.

Don’t have a Bible? Access these scriptures at biblegateway.com.