

Weekly Devotion November 16, 2020
Pastor Matthew Woods, Grace Lutheran Church

“When Facing Uncertainty? Part 2: Using the Strength Within You.”

Last week we talked about the uncertainty that many are feeling in 2020. We also talked about the importance to lean on what is certain when uncertainty strikes. Our only true certainty in an unstable, sinful world, is an eternal Jesus who remains the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. This week to begin our thoughts I would ask you to highlight Judges 4:14: “The LORD turned to him (Gideon) and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?”

What strength did Gideon have? First, we must realize that the Lord always sees potential before we see it in ourselves. The Lord saw potential in young David who was the youngest, the one with the least standing in the Jesse’s family. God looked at David’s heart and not at the outward strength of David’s brothers and eventually made David, a king. St. Paul was an enemy of the church but Jesus made him into an apostle to the Gentiles. Little children looked unimportant to the disciples who initially tried to prevent them from coming to Jesus but Jesus called them the greatest in the kingdom.

God saw potential in Gideon that he didn’t see in himself. Gideon knew the Lord and welcomed the visit from the Angel of the Lord. Gideon was also ready to humble himself before the Lord.

The Lord knew that Gideon also had courage as well as humility but that courage needed a chance to breath and to be let out to stretch its legs. The Lord broke the chains of fear by waking up that courage with the command to sacrifice to the Lord. In doing so Gideon first would to learn how to stand up to his own relatives and community for what was right in the eyes of the Lord. They were practicing idolatry. In the later verses of Judges 6 the Lord tells Gideon to tear down his father’s altar to idols and built an altar to the Lord. Still, instinctively cautious because his life had been lived in caution for so long, Gideon makes the sacrifice at night because we are told in verse 27 hat Gideon was afraid of his family’s reaction and the community.

Gideon sacrifices his father’s seven-year old bull (somehow, they had kept from the Midianites) to the Lord. In the morning many within his family want to condemn Gideon to death for destroying the altars to the idols. But his father steps up to defend Gideon, “If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar.”³² So because Gideon broke down Baal’s altar, they gave him the name Jerub-Baal that day, saying, ‘Let Baal contend with him.’” Gideon’s father loved his son and defended Gideon. So, another of Gideon’s strengths was his father who stood behind him in complete support. Perhaps a friend or family member stands behind us like this too. God was building within Gideon a courage in and through his father and especially through a successful sacrifice to the Lord.

Courage in truth is very rare. Very few have real courage. Like most of us, Gideon was always a work in progress. For example, the courage to confront family for the truth of

the Gospel is a touchy one. Often it gets passed over to maintain peace. And usually the unbelieving, or non-practicing Christian acts “offended” and “put out” often to intimidate and avoid or skew the conversation away from the Bible. But courage that is mixed with shrewd wisdom, tact, and an ability to listen is very hard to match. Gideon was fearful but he had other gifts; love for God, putting his actions where his mouth was, and wisdom to apply the information at the right time. We all have some gifts. Many simply misuse them or misplace them. Gideon had gifts that God wanted to use at that precise moment and time. Courage is rare but when applied with God-given gifts can bring courage to others.

And so, one night the Lord promised Gideon victory over the Midianites. The Midianite army was intimidating because of its size and reputation. But again, the Lord gave reason to believe in victory that was promised. So, he instructed Gideon to sneak down among the Midianite camp and listen. Gideon heard his own name mentioned with a tone of fear. We learn quickly that the truly courageous are the ones who are feared most; they are the most inspiring, and the most effective. God was shaping Gideon to be a courageous leader of Israel who would by his actions teach others to trust in God. Gideon was routinely afraid but acted anyway in faithfulness to God’s call. Gideon’s courage took action in his obedience to God’s instructions and his trust in God. And when he heard the fear of his enemies his courage solidified. Gideon that very night went immediately to work while the fear was still fresh in the minds of the soldiers. Uncertainty was now certain. God was already fighting for Gideon and Israel. Likewise, long before courage or wisdom we remember that God is already fighting for you and me. God is waking up places/gifts deep within us that we may not even know we have.

So, Gideon divided his men into three companies (100 each). Armed with torches, clay jars, and trumpets they shouted at the edge of the Midianite camp, blew their horns and raised their torches. The thousands of enemies turned on each other; the fear had turned them against one another in confusion. Eventually those that were left retreated and were later slaughtered by the Israelites. The battle belonged to the Lord and Gideon was the agent to play it out. The greatest strength Gideon had was the Lord. He is our strength too. And like Gideon Jesus is already preparing the path ahead.

Isaiah 65:42 reminds us; “Before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear. Romans 5:8 tells us, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” And Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” And in John 14:1-7 Jesus says, “I am going to the Father’s House to prepare a place for you. I will come back to get you so that you will be with me where I am.” All of these passages remind us our God and Lord, Jesus is always ahead of our enemies and in His wisdom far exceeds any of their schemes or strengths. He is always the reason for us to have courage and the reason eventually, all enemies, including death, are defeated. Imagine, for argument’s sake alone; if the resurrection of Jesus is real (and it is) what enemy can stand up against the truth of the Gospel. None. Finally, Jesus gives opportunities for good works to

wake up those deep places within us in a way that fortifies our own courage and trust in Him—which is the goal.

Like fear, courage is contagious. But unlike fear, courage is transformational too. Courage that acts will find strengths that we have, perhaps didn't know we have. When we put to action what we say we believe it inspires and encourages others to have courage in the Lord and come out of hiding as it did when Gideon called Israel to arms. The gifts within Gideon shaped Israel for a generation. We too shape the next generation either by our courage or in our hiding. By grace may we therefore be courageous and bold to trust in Jesus. Speak and someone may listen. Act and someone may believe and follow. Do not underestimate the strength you have in Jesus'. Amen.

Announcements and Blessings

Pastor Matthew Woods

John 3:30