

“Seeing What God Sees”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

3rd Sunday After Pentecost

June 5, 2016

The Old Testament lesson is from the book of Judges, chapter 6, verses 1 through 16, and verses 25 through 27. I'll be reading from the New Revised Standard Bible. The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian for seven years. The hand of Midian prevailed over Israel; and because of Midian the Israelites provided for themselves hiding-places in the mountains, caves and strongholds.

For whenever the Israelites put in seed, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east would come up against them. They would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the land, as far as the neighborhood of Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel, and no sheep or ox or donkey.

For they and their livestock would come up, and they would even bring their tents, as thick as locusts; neither they nor their camels could be counted; so they wasted the land as they came in. Thus Israel was greatly impoverished because of Midian; and the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help.

When the Israelites cried to the Lord on account of the Midianites, the Lord sent a prophet to the Israelites; and he said to them, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt, and brought you out of the house of slavery; and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians, and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you, and gave you their land; and I said to you, “I am the Lord your God; you shall not pay reverence to the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.” But you have not given heed to my voice.’

Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites. The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, ‘The Lord is with you, you mighty warrior.’

Gideon answered him, ‘But sir, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, “Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?” But now the Lord has cast us off, and given us into the hand of Midian.’

Then the Lord turned to him and said, ‘Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; I hereby commission you.’ He responded, ‘But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.’ The Lord said to him, ‘But I will be with you, and you shall strike down the Midianites, every one of them.’

That night the Lord said to him, ‘Take your father’s bull, the second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal that belongs to your father, and cut down the sacred pole that is beside it; and build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of the stronghold here, in proper order; then take the second bull, and offer it as a burnt-offering with the wood of the sacred pole that you shall cut down.’ So Gideon took ten of his servants, and did as the Lord had told him; but because he was too afraid of his family and the townspeople to do it by day, he did it by night. This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God.

Let’s pray. Faithful God who sees through eyes of faith, turn our eyes to see you through eyes of faith. Transform our hearts and minds to believe in a God who rescues and delivers. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Being faithful to God isn't much different than it was in Gideon's time. We can wander away from worshipping God consistently, we find ourselves no longer praying, and we can experience the enemy taking more control over our lives. Gideon and the Israelites found themselves in that situation.

The people of Israel were in big trouble. Throughout the book of Judges you'll read this often. "In those days there was no king in Israel. People did whatever they felt like doing . . ." People were self-governing and did what they thought was right, but mostly, they did whatever they felt like doing. They drifted from God and there was no king. *God was* supposed to be their direct ruler, but the people had no boundaries in their behavior, and the enemy was having a hay day.

The people were hiding in caves from Midian, Amalek, and the easterners. Their crops were being ravaged. They'd plant and then thieves would come into what used to be *their land* and steal livestock and take the harvest. It used to be the Israelites would move into an area and inherit other's crops! They would harvest what they hadn't planted and live in houses they hadn't built, but the Israelites had forgotten about God.

Their confidence and self-esteem was at an all-time low. Take a look at Gideon and picture this scene. Gideon is threshing wheat in a wine press. What's up with that? Wheat was something that would be threshed on a high hill and thrown into the air. When the wheat was in the air, the wind would catch it and blow the chaff away, and the wheat would drop to the bottom of the threshing floor. Here we have Gideon doing the threshing in a wine press—a big pit.

A winepress was cut into the sides of hills so when the grapes were brought from harvesting the winepress was right there. So picture this. Gideon is tossing wheat into the air and there's no wind because he's at the bottom of a huge pit—a wine press. He tosses the wheat up and instead of the chaff blowing away from his

body it falls down onto his sweaty brow and goes inside his shirt and sticks to his sweaty back. It gets in his mouth, in his nose, and he might even be gasping for air because it's sticking in his throat. Not a very encouraging situation.

The enemy is stealing everything from the people, and Gideon is threshing out his puny little harvest in the wine press. He's hiding and trembling, and he's lost hope. Then, Israel **remembers God**. They cry out to him and think *maybe* this is why our lives' are a mess. Maybe this is why we feel hopeless and defeated.

Now in our time and day, we wander away too. We remember how we felt when we were fired. But we remembered God, and come back to him and find an even better job. We recall how the insurance company wasn't paying up for the accident we were in, but right before we get to the end of our rope, we remember God, and a check is sent.

We can feel so defeated and helpless without God, but the Holy Spirit nudges us—remember God? Come back and worship! Start including me in your life again! Gideon's experience was the similar. The Lord said to Gideon, "I will be with you, and you shall strike down the Midianites, every one of them."

Gideon doubted God and himself! He blamed him for abandonment and his situation. But God reminded Gideon, "I am the Lord your God; you shall not pay reverence to the gods . . . in whose land you live." God tells Gideon to come back to him and worship. God sees Gideon's potential. God see's us through eyes of faith for who we can become! Gideon couldn't see his potential because he'd separated himself from God! He got spiritually lazy. When God chose Gideon he didn't see Gideon hiding in the wine press, he was looking at Gideon's potential!

God visualizes who we can become! So here's a question. Will we throw away our other gods and worship and obey so **we're able** to see with eyes of faith and then respond to God in faith?

What did Gideon do? He accepted the commission from God, destroyed the other gods in his life, and trusted the Lord for deliverance. He went to battle against the enemy, and they were destroyed. The Lord gave Gideon and the people victory. How about you, will we see what God sees in you and respond with faith?

Let's pray. Lord of hosts who is our victory and deliverance. Our lives aren't swords and shields like Gideon's. But our lives have the enemy around us who does his best to instill fear and draw us away from you. Help us return to you and worship only you. Make us faithful and courageous to see ourselves as you see us. Amen.