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Gideon the Mighty Warrior? Not!

Judges 6:12-16, 36-40

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Have you ever heard the term “laying out a fleece”? It is a technique to figure out the will of God. Hallelujah! Problem solved!

I tried it often in my early walk with Jesus. I said, “God, if you do this, then I will know that I should do that.” Here are some general examples (these are not mine, just ones I’ve heard):

- “I’m still not sure if I’m supposed to move to Cancun, so I’m going to put my house on the market. If it sells within a week, then that’s God’s sign I should go to Cancun.”
- “I really want to marry this man, but I’m not totally sure it’s God’s will. So, I’ll take it as a sign: if he comes up to me at lunch today and asks to eat with me, then he’s the one.”
- “I’m not sure if God is calling me into missions. Therefore, if our pastor preaches on missions this Sunday, then I’ll know I should go into missions.”
- “I’m going to close my eyes, open up my Bible at random, and whatever verse I point to, that’s God’s will for me.”

This concept of laying out a fleece comes from our scripture passage this morning. So turn with me to our passage listed in the bulletin. Before I read, let us pray:

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that as the Scriptures are read and your Word is proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Our scripture passage is in the middle of a story, so as with any story, you need to know the context. It is a time of fear for the Israelites. They are living in fear of their enemy. When I first moved to New Jersey, it was about a year after the 9/11 attacks. I

remember one woman saying to me how it was such a fearful time for those living in NJ. There was an attack north of them in NYC, an attack south of them in Washington DC, and an attack west of them in Pennsylvania. They were in the middle, and they wondered where the next attack was coming from and would they be next. They lived in fear.

The Israelites are living in fear of their enemy, so the people are living in caves and mountains. When they planted their crops, the enemy would come, ruin their crops and kill their animals. The people become impoverished, and they cried out to God for help. Now, one thing to keep in mind: God wasn't helping the people up to this point because the God's own people had turned their back on God. God allowed them to walk away with devastating consequences.

As our passage opens, Gideon is in a cave or a wine press, beating and sifting wheat. Normally, a person would be out in the open throwing the wheat in the air because the wind would blow away the chaff leaving the wheat. But Gideon is doing it in a cave so the enemy would not find him and take his food. He is hiding...in fear. It is in this atmosphere and in this location of a cave that an angel of God comes to Gideon.

Read Judges 6:12-16, 36-40

"The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." If you think about it, this is a rather comical statement, considering the angel is talking to a man hiding in fear in a cave. Mighty warrior? Gideon wasn't a mighty warrior; he was a scared farmer. When he heard those words, Gideon must have looked over his shoulder to see if there was anyone else in the cave with him. "Are you talking to me?"

The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.

Gideon has a problem with that statement. Not only is he wondering about the "mighty warrior" part, Gideon has a bunch of questions for God. What do you mean God is with us? Why did all these things happen to us if God is with us? Where are all God's miracles that God used to do for us? And the accusation: God has abandoned us.

Do these words and questions sound familiar to you? Ever since Gideon's time (so we are looking at 3500 years), people have been asking God the same questions. Why, God? Why did this happen? In my life? In our country? In our world? Where are your

miracles, God? Why didn't you stop the car that hit my friend's car head on and killed her? That's my question, and to this day I still wonder about that one.

What does God do with these questions – Gideon's questions and our questions? God does not answer them, at least the way we want them answered. God didn't answer all the questions 3500 years ago, and God doesn't answer them today. But what God does promise is this: "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior."

"But...." Gideon says.

God says, "I *will* work wonders. I am sending you, mighty warrior, to be the deliverer. I will be with you."

Time and time again, we say to God, are you with me? Now? Here? Yes, God says, I have already promised that I am always with you. That promise is repeated over and over in scripture.

"I will never leave you or forsake you" (Hebrew 13:5)

The Psalmist: "The Lord is my refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble."

Jesus, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The Lord is with you, mighty warrior. Let's look at that name...mighty warrior. God didn't say "I will be with you, fearful one" which would have been more accurate. God sees Gideon hiding in a cave and calls him mighty warrior. God sees Gideon not as he is (a fearful one), but God sees Gideon according to what God has called him to be (a mighty warrior).

God sees our humanness and calls us saints. In fact, scripture calls us a lot of things: a child of God (John 1:12), adopted into God's family (Ephesians 1:5) God's friend (John 15:15), God's masterpiece (Ephesians 2:10), a citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20), belonging to God (I Corinthians 6:20). We may not feel like those things, but that's what we are called and that is what we are.

I am with you, mighty warrior. God saw Gideon not as he was, but what he is called to be. Years ago, God saw me as a perky aerobic instructor and called me pastor (who would have thought!) God sees us not as we are, but as we can be.

With this in mind, I am going to ask you to do something really different for this congregation. I want you to turn to a person next to you and say, "God is with you...we are not going to say "mighty warrior" because that is rather politically incorrect term in our day and age. Turn to a person next to you and say, "God is with you, child of God."

Thank you. Kind of neat hearing it from someone else's lips, isn't it? . Back to Gideon.

But....Gideon says. Here come the excuses: My clan is the weakest. I am least in my family. How can I be a deliver?

I will be with you, mighty warrior.

But God, I am too old. My body doesn't work like it used to. I am not qualified. I'm too scared. I am retired. I don't have enough money. I am working.

I will be with you, child of God.

We now come to the fleece. Gideon is often used as a model of godly decision making to find out God's will. However, there is a problem with that. Do you know what it is? Gideon already knew God's will. You are going to be my deliver, God says, and save Israel. Gideon isn't trying to figure out God's will; he is trying to get out of it! Twice!

Gideon has the audacity to say to God, "**If you will do as you have promised.** Gideon is doubting God, and decides to test God.

God, I am going to put this wool fleece outside overnight, and if there is dew only on the fleece and not on the ground, I will know this is your will for me to be a mighty warrior and be the deliver of my people.

And amazingly, God goes along with it. I would have said, "Fine. I will find another mighty warrior. Do you have a brother?" But God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6). Words given to Moses who also did not want to do God's will.

Rats! Gideon says. Ok, God, let's do this again. How about this time the ground is wet and the fleece is dry.

And, God does it again. What is amazing in this whole story is God's remarkable patience with Gideon. Gideon manipulates God and God allows Himself to be manipulated. God wanted to rescue Israel and did what needed to be done to get Gideon to become a mighty warrior. Even accommodate all of Gideon's fears.

One thing we need to keep in mind when we read the stories of scripture that what happens is not necessarily what should happen. Putting out fleeces is not the most mature expression of faith. Scripture says "We walk by faith and not by sight." (I Corinthians 5:7) Gideon's faith was genuine, but it needed to grow.

Psalms 103 says, "As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him." Parents will sometimes accommodate themselves to their young children's need for assurance and affirmation. God, too, acquiesces to the requests of our sometimes feeble faith because God has compassion on us as a parent to a child.

God honors our faith even when it is weak. Isn't it wonderful that God is a God who will stoop down and reassure us in all our fears and doubts?

I am with you, child of God.

You need to know that Gideon did it. He was afraid, but he saved Israel with the strength of God. I heard someone once say (Joyce Meyers): "If you are scared to do something, then do it scared." Being scared shouldn't stop you. The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.

God gave to Gideon a name according to the task God called him to do. What name does God give you?

When I wake up in the morning and I don't feel much like a pastor, when I feel weak and unqualified (which by the way happened yesterday morning), I remember that God called this shy, introverted woman whose brain thinks in terms of numbers and God

called her to a job that deals with words, I think of Gideon and God says, "I am with you, Mighty Pastor."

When you wake up in the morning and you are filled with fear for what you must face that day, God says, I am with you, Fearless One.

When you begin your day in pain and facing a failing body, God says to you, I am with you, Child of God.

When God has called you to do a task that you have never done before, God says, I am with you, Gifted One.

When God simply calls you to follow Jesus this day, God says, I am with you, Faithful Follower.

In fact, most days knowing the will of God is simply following Jesus throughout your day. There is no need to put out a test for God or question the promise of God...for God is faithful.

Martin Luther said, "I know not the way God leads me, but well do I know my Guide." Maybe that is just the point. Knowing the Guide.

God is with you, Mighty People of God. Amen.

Please remain seating as we sing the next song found in the paperback hymnal.