

June 29 2014

**Scripture Lessons ~**

*Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18*

*Judges 7:1-8*

*Matthew 10: 40-42*

**Sermon**                      *Evening Out the Odds*

You know the ways of the society around about us are not always the ways of God. A friend of mine shared this fictional letter with me which kind of illustrates this point. And the letter goes like this:

Dear Sir:

Thank you for submitting the resume for the twelve men picked for management position in your organization. They have taken a battery of tests. We have run the results through our computer and, also, arranged personal interviews with each of them with our psychologist and also our vocational aptitude consultant. The profiles of all tests are included and you'll want to study each one of them very carefully. It is the staff opinion that most of the nominees are grossly lacking in background education and personal aptitude for the type of enterprise that you are undertaking. They do not have a team concept. We recommend that you continue to search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.

For example: your man Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and he is given to fits of temper.

Andrew had absolutely no qualities of leadership, what so ever.

Brothers James and John place personal interest above company loyalty.

Thomas, well Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude which would probably tend to undermine morale in the company.

We feel to it is our duty to tell you, Matthew has been black listed by the greater Jerusalem's Better Business Bureau.

James, the Son of Alphas and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings and both registered high on the scale for manic depression.

One of the candidates though showed some great potential. He is a man of ability and he is a man of resourcefulness, he meets people well and has a keen business mind and has contacts in very high places. He is highly motivated. He is ambitious. He is responsible and so we recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and your right hand man. All the other profiles are pretty self-explanatory and so we wish you every success in your venture.

Sincerely Yours,  
Jordan Management Consultant  
Jerusalem in Palestine

The ways of the society that is around us are definitely not always the ways of God. I don't care what the Jordan Management Consultant thinks. Gideon discovered this in our scripture lesson from the Book of judges that Joyce shared with us today.

This army of 32,000 people was camped beside the spring of Herod and the just north of them was their enemy, the Midianites, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. Gideon was already for battle; he was armed to the teeth; he had recruited the toughest and shrewdest of fighting men. He had geographic knowledge of the whole area and had estimated the strength of the Midianites. His men were lean and they were mean and ready to take anybody on. He felt that all he had to do was to get out in front of them and yell "**CHARGE**" and the Midianites would surely be his.

But again, as Joyce shared with us, God had a pretty different idea. God said to Gideon, "The people with you are a way too many for me to give the Midianites into your hands."

Gideon said, "Say what God? Say what, too many. You got to be kidding. You can never have too many people when going into battle. That is the first lesson they teach you in war school. Oh, but you are not finished speaking yet, God, so excuse me, so go ahead."

"The people with me are too many for you to give me the Midianites into your hands. Less, less", said God "Less you want by your own hand has delivered me in this war".

“Oh”, said Gideon, “I get it now, you’re afraid now that if 32,000 of us beat the Midianites we would think that we were victorious because of our strength, our superior power our superior numbers. OK God, then God what do you suggest.” “You’re kidding, say that again, whoever is fearful and trembling let that person go home. Before a battle like this most of my men are fearful and trembling. All of us are fearful and trembling. We won’t have many people left if you allow that to happen, God.”

But Gideon did as God said. 32,000 men what the Lord said. How many went home? 22,000 went home. Then God looked at that 10,000 that were left and said what? “Still too many. The people are still too many, take them down to the water and I will test them for you.”

So Gideon led his men down to the water and the Lord said to him that everyone that drinks like a dog on all fours legs will go home and everyone who drinks water with his hand will stay and fight and how many were left? How many were left? 300. From 32,000 to 300 for poor Gideon. It was less than 1% of what he had to go into the battle in the first place.

Gideon thought there is no way I am going to win this battle. I am sure now God said to himself you can’t lose. You can’t lose because the ways that society is around us and not always the ways of God. It is a wonderful story from the Old Testament and it challenges us to ask ourselves the question so what? What does this have to do with living my everyday Christian faith?

First of all, I think that this story from Judges shows us that God loves (I know you think this is sounds strange) to hear his people to cry out. How I can possibly win? Doesn’t that sound counterintuitive When God says this, God love this because not being vindictive because God loves each one of us so much. You see, heroes of the spirit are people who place their faith in the things unseen in this world; when they are in difficult situations. God loves hopeless situations in the sense it is then people will turn to God for help. God loves to hear people cry out, they can’t win, because then he knows that they are ready to turn and ask for the very help that they need and they can win with the support of God and of the support of loved ones all around them.

So Gideon's 300 crept up on the Midianites at night. They were gravely outnumbered for all the people of the East lay along in the valley like locusts, a multitude and their camels were without number as the sand upon the seashore. That was the way book the of Judges saying that there were thousands and thousands of Midianites there. Gideon's 300 stationed themselves around the camp at night and each one had a fire in a jar and then each one blew his trumpet loudly. What happened? It frightened the Midianites to death. They slashed each and fought themselves and killed many of their own men and they fled in their confusion. This desperately small army defeated the overwhelming odds against them, but they did not do it in their own strength, but they did it in the strength of God.

And secondly as Christians we should, also, see in this mighty event of a kind of prefiguring of a deep spiritual truth and that deep spiritual truth is this we have no power to rescue ourselves from the mistakes of the past. We are wholly dependent upon God's grace in this life. Recall how Paul wrote on this subject in his second letter to the church at Corinth. Paul says three times I sought the Lord about this that it should leave me, maybe he was talking his painful recurring and maybe embarrassing thorn in the flesh but God said to me my grace is sufficient for you; for my power is made strong in your weakness. I will more gladly boast of my weakness so the power of Jesus will rest upon me for the sake of Jesus. I am content with my weakness, for when I am weak then I am strong.

I don't know how many of you remember the actress of Gilda Radner. She was a favorite in the old Saturday Night Live TV program. She had been a cover story on Life Magazine and many other magazines of the day because she at that point in her life was fighting cancer. She had been written up as one who had conquered cancer but ultimately she had not conquered cancer at all. She said these words, now I have learned the hard way she wrote some poems don't rhyme and some don't have that clear beginning, that clear middle and that clear ending but I always had a twinkle in my eye as though I touched the face of God because that is what I felt I had done. Before Gilda died she learned a deep spiritual lesson in life. Some poems as all of us

we know, don't rhyme and when that happens and we turn to God, we discover that God was facing us all of the time, just waiting just waiting for us to turn our greatest weakness into the strength we need to get through that difficult time.

Finally this event in the Old Testament reminds us of who is in charge of the world. It is my Father's world. God is in charge of this world. People who do not know God often attracted and tuned in to what is full of life, what is full of power in this world and they never do know the things of the spirit. It sounds like Pollyanna but I believe it in the depths of my soul, it is really is love that makes the world go around. God's love for us and our love for God and for one another. It is God's spirit that is bringing changes in the world around us. God's spirit and the church God's spirit are just calling us to heights of thinking, commitment and to service.

I read this story of Pastor Joanna Adams who went with her congregation way back when, when Hurricane Karina had destroyed New Orleans. She went with Church World Service, the same group we support for disasters situations. And when they got out of their buses when they arrived to New Orleans with cases loaded down with everything that all of us think is essential in the world from the bug spray to panties hose from peanut butter to Pepto-Bismol all crammed in those suitcases. They soon became very embarrassed by all those possessions they had brought and they were humbled by the awareness that the true wealth they saw was not in their suitcases; not even in their whole bus, but in the joyous faces they encountered among the homeless people that they worked with during those couple of weeks.

Our time with you is a time enlightenment Joanna wrote to her new friends later. We realize that we seek our security of life from so many things and I do mean things, we seek security in the money in the bank; security in the weapons in our arsenal; we seek security with the diplomas on the wall. For you, you rest securely in the arms of God. The ways of society around us are not the ways of God and sometimes this not become clear until the odds are stacked against us in life. But if we do remember that God operates the best in us in those times of weakness; if we remember we cannot rescue ourselves in life and we

are totally dependent on God's grace. If we remember that God is in charge of the world and not the powers of evil. We might have a chance to succeed in evening out the odds in life.

Together we say AMEN