

**SERMON: 8 September 2019 – Rev Brenda Robson**  
**“Gideon – Strength in Weakness”**  
**(Judges 6:11–18; 6:25–40; 7:2–9; 7:19–23)**

We are spending some time in the book of Judges – we have looked at Samson and Deborah and today we look at Gideon.

I like Gideon, he is someone we can all relate to, his story gives us hope and confidence in the God who uses human weakness to display his power and glory.

Gideon is not brave. Bravery is the ability to take on difficult situations without fear. But ultimately he is courageous. Courage is taking on difficult situations even when you are afraid. And maybe that is more like most of us.

Gideon was not a warrior, he was a farmer. And he lived his life afraid.

**Judges 6** tells us the story of when God put the Israelites under the captivity of the Midianites as a result of Israelites sin of idolatry.

At one time the Midianites had lived peacefully alongside the Israelites. The Midianites were descended from Midian, one of Abraham’s sons. When Moses escaped from Egypt after killing an Egyptian guard, he spent 40 years in Midian and married Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, a Midianite priest.

But later, before the Israelites entered the promised land, the Midianites became enemies of Israel. They were fearful of this huge Israelite population travelling across the wilderness so they teamed up with other nations against Israel and they encouraged Israelites to worship Baal and other Gods. One of the last things Moses did, with God’s help, was defeat the Midianite army and kill five kings of Midian.

But the Midianites increased in number again and were once more a formidable force in the time of the Judges. When the Israelites again sinned against God, he allowed them to be severely oppressed by the Midianites for seven years.

The Israelites went into hiding in the mountains, caves, and strongholds.

Any time the Israelites planted their crops, raiders from Midian, would attack Israel, camp in the land and destroy crops and take all their livestock. Their enemies would arrive on multitudes of camels and stayed until the land was completely ravaged. The Israelites were impoverished and left with nothing to eat.

When the angel of the Lord came to Gideon he was threshing wheat in a winepress.

A winepress is a pit or large vat where grapes were collected and the juice squeezed from them and channelled into a large container. Of course, winepresses were usually dug in vineyards. But Gideon was not pressing grapes in a winepress which was the normal thing; he was threshing his wheat in a winepress not at a threshing floor.

A threshing floor is a large flat rock located outside the village where the wheat was crushed after harvest and the grain is separated from the chaff with the aid of the wind which blows away the useless chaff as the crushed wheat is winnowed and thrown into the air. Usually threshing was done at night.

Gideon was threshing wheat in a hiding place to be out of sight of the Midianites.

He was not being a coward hiding away in the winepress as is sometimes said, he was actually showing courage and faith.

The time Gideon was threshing his wheat was not the best time, and the place he was threshing wasn't the right place but he felt he had to do something. Though the circumstances were not perfect, he knew he must use what he had to achieve something. He didn't give in to despair or fold his arms and say there's nothing to be done or accept that his family would go hungry. He therefore turned the winepress into a threshing floor since he couldn't go to the normal threshing floor which would have exposed him to the attack of the enemy.

Gideon refused to be enslaved to the convention that wheat was threshed at a threshing floor – he didn't allow the circumstances he found himself in to limit him. He thought out of the box. He wasn't trapped in the belief that “we've aye done it that way” as if there is no other way!

**Eccl 11:4** says, **“He who observes the wind [and waits for all conditions to be favourable] will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap” (The Amplified Bible).** In other words, get on with it!

The problem with many people today is that they're using the perceived unfavourable conditions as an excuse for their inaction. They're not doing anything yet because they're waiting for a perfect condition to start that course or apply for that job or have that prayer time or read that book or start that project.

We hear so often that the church and faith in God is in terminal decline and we are paralysed, we become negative and filled with gloom, what can we do about it?

We're so busy that we haven't enough time to read our bibles every day but we think that when we go on holiday we'll have lots more time. But on holiday there are so many distractions that we still don't find the time and resolve to organise things better when we return to our daily routine.

We are tempted, we might even feel called, to follow a certain path but then we think of all the things that could go wrong and we are put off by the uncertainties. We do not trust God with the future or even with next step.

But the truth is that there is hardly a perfect time, so such people will wait forever.

Gideon didn't wait for the perfect condition to thresh his wheat at a threshing floor.

He had access to a winepress. He kept hope alive. He used what he had.

And that was where the angel of God appeared to him and spoke to him. Verses 11-12 say, "**...Gideon was threshing wheat in the winepress, out of sight of the Midianites. The angel of God appeared to him and said, 'God is with you, O mighty warrior'**" (The Message).

Now this farmer might have been showing courage in threshing his wheat in spite of the enemy nearby but he considered himself no warrior!

But God saw something in this humble, weak man that made Him choose Gideon as the one to deliver the Israelites.

He saw a man who didn't give up; he saw a man who hoped against hope.

He saw a man who was suffering under the burden of God's punishment but still had not forgotten about the miracle power of God. He remembered that the Lord had brought his people out of slavery in Egypt (**Judges 6:13**).

Gideon must have been hoping that God would once again provide miracles among His people to free them once again from their troubles – self-inflicted troubles – and so he continued to thresh his wheat temporarily in a winepress. He did not think for one moment that he was to be the miracle who would release his people.

God doesn't wait for a perfect condition by human standards to do what He wants to do. **He appears in the most unexpected places at the most unexpected times using the most unexpected people to do the most unexpected things!** And so he says today, stop making excuses; stop procrastinating. Do what you can do and God will meet you on the way. The angel of God appeared to Gideon in the winepress! God will meet you in your winepress – in the most unexpected place, at the most unexpected hour.

Gideon did not see himself as God's man, God's warrior. He argued with God – **"But Lord, how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh and I the least in my family" (6:15)**

Or in The Message – **"Me, my Master? How and with what could I ever save Israel from Midian? My clan's the weakest in Manasseh and I'm the runt of the litter."**

Gideon did not see himself having the strength and authority to lead a quarrelling and bickering nation of Israelites! But God was not blind to Gideon's fear and uncertainty. He knew the man inside and out, he knew his heart and his thoughts. And God saw the bigger picture. He looked to the future and he saw Gideon's character *after* God had inspired him and bolstered him and worked with him. So God already saw the mighty warrior even although Gideon only saw the mere man with all his human weaknesses.

God can see the potential in each one of us even if we cannot.

He can see what we might be if only we had more courage to step out.

He can see what we might achieve if only we could take the next step.

He can see the people we might influence if only we had the trust to make ourselves vulnerable and take a chance, take a risk.

God is more concerned about spiritual strength than our physical power and, in fact, if we are physically weak then God can do more amazing things through us, things that point to God's glory.

Centuries after Gideon, Paul asked God if he would take away a physical impairment or recurring illness that he felt was slowing him down and God refused. Paul wrote – in The Passion Translation –

**Three times I pleaded with the Lord to relieve me of this. But he answered me "My grace is always more than enough for you and my**

**power finds its full expression through your weakness.” So I will celebrate my weaknesses, for when I am weak I sense more deeply the mighty power of Christ living in me. So I’m not defeated by my weakness but delighted! For when I feel my weakness and endure mistreatment – when I’m surrounded with troubles on every side and face persecution because of my love for Christ – I am made yet stronger. For my weakness becomes a portal to God’s power.**

And so Gideon, still in trepidation and fear, took the first steps with God. He was strengthened by God’s presence when he saw the offering of meat and bread miraculously burst into flames. So he tore down the wooden alter to Baal and burnt it. But he did it secretly at night because he was afraid to do it openly and in the morning his father had to protect him from the angry worshippers of Baal.

Bolstered a little bit more, Gideon sent out messengers and began to gather his army. But he faltered again and he wants proof that God will be with him, not once but twice. First he wants to find a wet fleece on dry ground then he wants to find a dry fleece on wet ground.

And when Gideon gathers 32,000 men and God reduces the number to 10,000 and then only 300, he gets cold feet again. And so God allows him to overhear a dream in the enemy camp that assures him that God will be victorious over the Midianites.

We might look at Gideon’s scepticism and lack of faith, why does he keep asking God for proof? But if we are honest, we too look to God for confirmation and assurances that we are on the right path. We ask for signs, for encouragement from a friend, for verses that apply to our situation. We sometimes put out a fleece.

There seems to be a contradiction here because we are told in scripture not to put the Lord our God to the test and yet here God appears to respond positively to Gideon’s requests for reassurance. God’s interactions with Gideon are gentle, loving, patient and intimately personal.

Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees and hypocrites when he said “**A wicked and wayward generation always asks for signs...**” (Matthew 16:4) and Paul had a similar audience in mind when he said “**the Jews constantly demand to see miraculous signs**” (1 Corinthians 1:22).

These people seeking signs were not followers of Jesus and had no intention of following Jesus. They enjoyed seeing miracles and wonders and wanted more and more but ultimately they would put to death the miracle-maker.

I believe that God does speak to us today in signs and wonders and indeed he delights in doing so.

If a non-believer is genuinely seeking God and God knows that he will eventually respond and follow Jesus, then God can encourage that person through signs and dreams and wonders.

When a follower of Jesus is seeking a new path or a solution to a problem, whatever need they bring to God in prayer, then God can speak to them through a sign or a word of scripture or a dream.

People sometimes say to me “God never speaks to me” or “God never shows me anything” but I would respond by saying that he does, but you are not listening or you are not seeing.

Jeremiah 29:11-13 (NIV) –

**For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.**

Matthew 7:7 -

**Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.**

Amen