

THE GOD WHO PROVIDES

17th September 2017

Preceding the Annual Congregational Meeting

Readings: Judges 7:1-8; Philippians 4:10-13

This morning we come to our third of four messages in our “On the MOVE” series. Over the month of September our focus is “Being on the MOVE, for Christ”. The focus is to be more involved in prayer, serving, giving and inviting.



Josh kicked off with prayer a couple of Sundays ago and last week I preached on serving. This morning we'll be looking at giving. And of course when a preacher talks about giving all sorts of red flags go up... Why is this? I suppose it's because many of us have heard preaching on giving done badly. It's far too easy to cheapen or even manipulate the Gospel while appealing for money. So, we may have attended a church with an ambitious building program and became weary as money dominated church life. Or we may have seen a televangelist living the high life while promising God's blessings to those who send them money.

Well this morning I'm going to take a round about way to address giving. With the deficit budget in mind we're going to look at why God brings such difficulties into our lives and how we can make a difference. We'll do this by diving back into Judges and to a situation where God deliberately took resources from his people and then said, "Stand amazed as I meet this need"

Prayer

So, let's turn to this morning's passage, Judges 7 and the story of Gideon. A brief recap of Gideon reminds us Israel had rejected God and his ways. After being warned Israel was now oppressed by surrounding nations. However, in his mercy, God decides to raise up Gideon to rescue his people. Now there're no surprises here, as this is the pattern of Judges. However we're surprised when an angel appears to an Gideon saying...

"The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." Judges 6:12

Even Gideon thinks that the angel has the wrong man as he's threshing wheat in the cover of a wine press. Why? Out of fear of the Midianites. However, despite

Gideon's objections the angel commissions him to rescue God's people. Soon after Gideon is put to the test as a coalition of nations gather for war. What is he to do?

Well, let's look at what he's up against. What are the numbers? Judges 8:10 tells us the enemy has 135,000 troops. In fact 7:12 tells us that the...

... eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore. Judges 7:12.

Meanwhile Gideon's mustered just 32,000. That's a four to one ratio against. Terrible odds. Every Israelite soldier has to kill or chase away four of the enemy. Gideon's on a hiding to nothing. Which is probably why over the previous two nights he used a woollen fleece. Do remember the story? Gideon prays, "Lord I'll know you'll rescue Israel by my hand if the woollen fleece, left out all night, is wet from dew and the ground dry." And so it was - wet fleece, dry ground. To make doubly sure, the next night he prayed the opposite - wet ground and dry fleece. And so it was.

So, Gideon starts the day with 32,000 men and a dry fleece. God's promised, so Gideon's good to go. Picking up the story in 7:2 we read...

The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, announce now to the people, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained. Judges 7:2-3

Now, this is bit of a set back. How would you feel if you now had 10,000 to face 135,000? These are 13:1 odds. Every Israelite soldier has to kill or chase away thirteen of the enemy! Still, God's promised - so into battle. But wait - there's more.

But the Lord said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." Judges 7:4

So Gideon takes the 10,000 down to the water. Most get on their knees and drunk directly from the river, however three hundred use their hands to lap the water.

The Lord said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place. Judges 7:7

Things are now looking very scary. The odds are 450:1. Each Israelite soldier has to kill or chase away 450 of the enemy. How's this going to work? One can imagine Gideon clutching the dry fleece - the promise of God - a lot tighter.

Before we move on let's pause and ask, "What on earth is God doing here? Why is he putting his people, whom he loves, at such risk? Why wind Gideon up?" Well the answer is two fold. First, so Israel won't boast that 32,000 was strong enough to beat 135,000 (vs 2). You see, if an army wins a battle with 4 to 1 against them what does that prove? It proves what mighty warriors they are and the nations will be in awe of them. However, 300 against 135,000, is so impossible it can only be of God. What will this prove? How mighty God is and the nations will be in awe - not of Israel - but of God.

And this is then second reason. It's not only so Israel cannot boast about how mighty they are but that God gets the glory.

I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. Isaiah 42:8

And we too can learn here. For there are times when God allows what we trust in to be striped away so we face certainly calamity. He does this so when he meets our need we cannot boast it was because of us. No, not at all. Our boast is in the Lord who meets our need. And those looking on - will see a God who is living and active and mighty to act.

Now, God doesn't leave Gideon stranded, scared witless and paralysed to act. God knows Gideon's hold on the fleece, onto his promise, is tenuous. Gideon's faith is shaky and needs a boost. So that night God tells him to sneak over to the enemy camp. There, hidden in the shadows, he overhears a soldier tell of a dream he's just had. A dream involving a large barley loaf smashing into, and destroying, his tent. His friend exclaims, "Surely this is a sign Gideon will win a great victory". Gideon can't believe his ears. Who would have thought God would give a dream to an enemy, just to build his faith. Gideon is so grateful what does he do?

When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped God. Judges 7:15

Gideon worships God, quietly, I imagine, Not in a pumping Pentecostal sort of way but in a quiet, dignified Presbyterian sort of way :) Anyway, slipping back into the darkness a reassured Gideon prepares for battle.

The night is still long when he returns so mobilising the three hundred he gives each a clay jar. A flaming touch is inserted into each jar and they position themselves around the enemy camp. It is very dark and very still. At Gideon's command the clay jars are broken and trumpets blown. The sound awakes the

enemy camp and seeing the lights they imagining thousands of Israelites bearing down on them. Thrown into confusion we read in verse 22.

... the Lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. Judges 7:22.

120,000 are killed that night. 15,000 escape but the next day are also defeated. Meanwhile, Gideon and the 300 are unscathed as God wins an amazing victory. Who gets the glory? Israel. No, not with just three hundred. God gets the glory. Whom to the nations fear - Israel? Maybe. But the God of Israel - most definitely.

Now, given that today's sermon is on giving, what's the connection? Why choose a military victory when there are a number of Bible passages directly dealing with giving. Passages like Abraham tithing 10 percent to the high priest Melchizedek or Moses telling God's people to stop giving to the Tabernacle construction as their generosity was overwhelming. In the New Testament we could have looked at Paul taking up an offering for the hard pressed Christians in Jerusalem, or Barnabas selling property to give to the church. We could have even looked at Ananias and Sapphira who were struck dead when they brought their offering to church. Do you remember the story in Acts 5? Now that'd be sermon to increase the church's coffers! So, why choose Gideon and the 300?

Well, the reason is with Gideon we see God putting his people into a pressure situation where they can't rely on their own strength, their own resources, their own ability to get through. With 32,000 troops they were hard pressed but not without hope. But when they were down to 300 victory it was impossible But they won with not one Israelite being able to claim it was because of them. And just as importantly and the surrounding nations were in awe of the Living God. Not one boast, and a lot of worshipping God.

I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. Isaiah 42:8

And as I was pondering this passage a few weeks ago in light of a deficit that was then 18K for our operating budget and 40k plus for depreciation I couldn't help think that God was doing something similar to us. Allowing a difficult situation to develop so would need to trust him against great odds. Our challenge is financial and not a military one but the principle is the same. Against great odds, God will come through. Why? So we could not boast and so he would get the glory.

Now it's been the six weeks or so since I shared these thoughts with Parish Council. And there was a sense amongst the elders that God will not only provide but is preparing us for greater things. That his hand is upon GPC and our service to him. Remember why we are facing a deficit. Because we've employed a youth

worker. Why have we employed a youth worker? Because we've identified the most open mission field in Glendowie is young people in the families.

Now in the last couple of months the finance subcommittee of Parish Council has worked hard on the budget, trimming a number of costs, especially property. They've brought the deficit down to just over 5K and depreciation just over 30k. So here we are - facing a challenge, looking for God to provide so no one can boast. So he receives the glory and no other.

And as I was preparing this message I pondered and prayed about application. How can we be part of the 300? Those chosen by God to be in his people, in this place - in GPC. Given that God has chosen us worship Christ and to give him and no other the glory. Given we are called to express our faith by praying, inviting, serving and in particular giving - what can we do in the area of giving.

Well, Paul our treasurer tells me many of us are giving by automatic payment. Now the thing with automatic payments is they are easy to "set and often forget". How often are they reviewed. Now, I realised it's been a long time since Judy and I reviewed our automatic giving. So we reviewed it and it's now adjusted. A simple thing - and do able for many, though not all. However remember that with the 300, they broke their jars and blew their trumpets - small in the bigger scheme of things - yet God used this to accomplish his will and bring great glory to himself.

So, imagine where we'll be in 6 months time as we follow Christ by his Spirit for the glory of our Heavenly Father.. Imagine what we will report on at next years ACM - how with limited resources God has done above and beyond what we could possibly imagine.

Let's pray