

Sermon for Morning Prayer: Trinity V

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

First Lesson: Judges 6:11-23 (KJV).

“And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house. And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.

“And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so.

“Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight. And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face. And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die.”

Second Lesson: St. Luke 5:1-11 (KJV).

“And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

“The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor”. Judges 6:12 (RSV).

Body:

What kind of greeting is that for a wimp and a whiner? The man was hiding in a wine press for fear that a marauding band of Midianites would see him threshing wheat and come steal it. You and I would be hard put to see much courage in that.

The greeting was puzzling to Gideon as well. He did not see himself as a mighty man of valor, and he did not see God as being present with him, so he immediately began to complain. “Pray sir,” he says to the angel, “if the Lord is with us, why then has all this befallen us?”

Gideon is not the only one who ever raised that question. People still raise it today. If God is with us and really loves us, why does He allow terrible things to happen to us? It is a legitimate question, but God never answers it.

He did not answer it for Gideon. He did not answer it for Job. He has never answered it for me, and He is not likely to answer it for you. It's all right to ask. Just don't expect an answer. God simply ignores the question and goes on to tell you, if you are able to hear, what He wants you to do. So He said to Gideon, "Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel."

Well, Gideon still did not see himself as a man of either valor or might. "Pray. Lord," he says, "how can I deliver Israel? Behold my clan is the weakest in Manassah, and I am the least in my family."

But God didn't see it that way. God, you see, is not bound by time as we are. We see the present. We remember the past. We do not see the future. But for God, the past, the present, and the future are all part of an eternal present. God sees all of time at once. The night and the day are both alike to Him, as the psalmist says. So when God calls Gideon a mighty man of valor, He is simply calling the future into the present and the potential into the actual.

God does that a lot. Let me give you some other examples.

God calls Israel a holy people. The Israelites are notorious for their apostasy. They are constantly following the ways of their pagan neighbors and committing adultery with idols. They treat with disdain the prophets who are sent to call them back to the ways of God. They even crucify their own Messiah. And yet God calls them a holy people because that is what He intends to make them.

Another example: Gabriel's greeting to the Virgin Mary: "Hail, O favored one. The Lord is with you." And Luke goes on to say that Mary was troubled by that greeting and wondered what it meant. She did not see herself as especially favored, but that's how God saw her.

Another example: St. Peter. He is impetuous. He is a braggart. When the pressure is on, he denies that he ever knew Jesus, and he flees with the others and hides on the day of crucifixion. And yet Jesus calls him "rock". And sure enough, Peter becomes as steady and strong in his faith as a rock.

Another example: Even as St. Paul berates the members of the Church, and especially the church in Corinth, for their arrogance, their selfishness, their quarrelsomeness, their sexual promiscuity, and their stubborn attachment to the ways and values of the material world, he still calls them “saints” and reminds them that they are the body of Christ on earth, because that is what they are in the eyes of God. That is also what you and I are in the eyes of God.

We may have all the faults that Paul saw in the church of his day, and all the faults that the prophets saw in the Israel of their time, and maybe even some unsavory characteristics of our own in addition, but God sees all of us as saints and members of the body of Christ. He looks at each one of us, as He looked at Gideon, and sees great potential. But in order to realize that potential, we have to respond in faith. We have to begin to act like the people God intends us to be.

When I was coaching Little League baseball, I told my players to show up looking like winners — shoes shined, shirts tucked in, hats on straight. I told them to step into the batter’s box looking like hitters, swing as if they meant it, and never take a called third strike. The weakest hitters often struck out swinging, but sometimes they put the ball in play and good things happened. They looked like ball players, I treated them like ball players, and after a while they began to play like ball players. That’s how faith works, and that’s why faith and works can never be separated.

Gideon went out in faith and organized a military operation. He became a mighty man of valor.

Mary believed the angel and gave birth to the Savior of the world. She became blessed among women.

Peter received the Holy Spirit and boldly proclaimed that there is salvation in none other than Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified and risen Messiah. He became what Jesus called him, the rock on which the Church would be built. And you too are rocks. You too are favored and blessed women. You too are mighty men of valor.

You too are bold proclaimers of the Gospel in a world obsessed with itself. That is how God sees you, no matter how others may see you and no matter how you may see yourself.

It is hypocritical to pretend to be something you are not. But it is not hypocrisy to project what you really are in the eyes of God. And what you really are is what God intends for you to become.

Gideon started out as a wimp and a whiner. He thought of himself as a victim. But he adopted God's image of him rather than his own, and became what the angel called him – a mighty man of valor.

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