

**Judges: By God's Hand**  
**Sermon 7-29-18**  
**By Pastor Curtis Dehmey**

**Judges 6:33-7:25**

<sup>33</sup>Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East came together, and crossing the Jordan they encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. <sup>34</sup>But the spirit of the LORD took possession of Gideon; and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him. <sup>35</sup>He sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, and they too were called out to follow him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they went up to meet them. <sup>36</sup>Then Gideon said to God, "In order to see whether you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said, <sup>37</sup>I am going to lay a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said." <sup>38</sup>And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. <sup>39</sup>Then Gideon said to God, "Do not let your anger burn against me, let me speak one more time; let me, please, make trial with the fleece just once more; let it be dry only on the fleece, and on all the ground let there be dew." <sup>40</sup>And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew.

<sup>1</sup>Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the troops that were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod; and the camp of Midian was north of them, below the hill of Moreh, in the valley. <sup>2</sup>The LORD said to Gideon, "The troops with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand. Israel would only take the credit away from me, saying, 'My own hand has delivered me.' <sup>3</sup>Now therefore proclaim this in the hearing of the troops, 'Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home.'" Thus Gideon sifted them out; twenty-two thousand returned, and ten thousand remained. <sup>4</sup>Then the LORD said to Gideon, "The troops are still too many; take them down to the water and I will sift them out for you there. When I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go with you; and when I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." <sup>5</sup>So he brought the troops down to the water; and the LORD said to Gideon, "All those who lap the water with their tongues, as a dog laps, you shall put to one side; all those who kneel down to drink, putting their hands to their mouths, you shall put to the other side." <sup>6</sup>The number of those that lapped was three hundred; but all the rest of the troops knelt down to drink water. <sup>7</sup>Then the LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred that lapped I will deliver you, and give the Midianites into your hand. Let all the others go to their homes." <sup>8</sup>So he took the jars of the troops from their

hands, and their trumpets; and he sent all the rest of Israel back to their own tents, but retained the three hundred. The camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

<sup>9</sup>That same night the LORD said to him, “Get up, attack the camp; for I have given it into your hand. <sup>10</sup>But if you fear to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah; <sup>11</sup>and you shall hear what they say, and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to attack the camp.” Then he went down with his servant Purah to the outposts of the armed men that were in the camp. <sup>12</sup>The Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley as thick as locusts; and their camels were without number, countless as the sand on the seashore. <sup>13</sup>When Gideon arrived, there was a man telling a dream to his comrade; and he said, “I had a dream, and in it a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian, and came to the tent, and struck it so that it fell; it turned upside down, and the tent collapsed.” <sup>14</sup>And his comrade answered, “This is no other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, a man of Israel; into his hand God has given Midian and all the army.” <sup>15</sup>When Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped; and he returned to the camp of Israel, and said, “Get up; for the LORD has given the army of Midian into your hand.”

<sup>16</sup>After he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and put trumpets into the hands of all of them, and empty jars, with torches inside the jars, <sup>17</sup>he said to them, “Look at me, and do the same; when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. <sup>18</sup>When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the trumpets around the whole camp, and shout, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon!’” <sup>19</sup>So Gideon and the hundred who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just set the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands. <sup>20</sup>So the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars, holding in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow; and they cried, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!” <sup>21</sup>Every man stood in his place all around the camp, and all the men in camp ran; they cried out and fled. <sup>22</sup>When they blew the three hundred trumpets, the LORD set every man’s sword against his fellow and against all the army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath.

<sup>23</sup>And the men of Israel were called out from Naphtali and from Asher and from all Manasseh, and they pursued after the Midianites. <sup>24</sup>Then Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, “Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters against them, as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan.” So all the men of Ephraim were called out, and they seized the waters as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan. <sup>25</sup>They captured the two captains of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb; they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the wine press of Zeeb, as they pursued the Midianites. They brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon beyond the Jordan.

## Message:

To start today, I'm going to read a familiar story to you all, "After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. <sup>2</sup>A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. <sup>3</sup>Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. <sup>4</sup>Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. <sup>5</sup>When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' <sup>6</sup>He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. <sup>7</sup>Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' <sup>8</sup>One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, <sup>9</sup>'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' <sup>10</sup>Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. <sup>11</sup>Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. <sup>12</sup>When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' <sup>13</sup>So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. <sup>14</sup>When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.'" The disciples have a problem. Five thousand people are there to hear Jesus, but they have very little to feed them. As Philip says, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." How are they going to feed these people? Then this little boy comes along with five loaves and two fish. This little boy comes with very little. But as Andrew says, "what are they among so many people?" This is impossible. This isn't even going to make a dent in feeding these people. But, from a small boy and such a small amount of food, Jesus feeds five thousand people. Large problem, small offerings, God turns smallness into greatness. God turns the feeble into the miraculous. God loves working with small people, small things, so we can witness and testify of the bigness of God.

In our Judges passage, we also see God work through smallness. Before our passage in the beginning of chapter 6, guess what happens again? Deborah reigned for 40 years and then "The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian seven years." And guess what they also did again? Yup. You guessed it. They complained. "When the Israelites cried to the Lord on account of the Midianites, the Lord sent a prophet to the Israelites..." And essentially the prophet relays a rebuttal from God saying that He's delivered them from so much, why should He deliver them now if they don't "heed" His voice? Although God offers this rebuttal, He sends an angel to call forth Gideon, a farmer. And then the Lord calls Gideon to tear down an altar of

Baal and the sacred pole because we know how much God loves when the Israelites worship other gods (sarcasm). This action gets Gideon in trouble. And that's where we land at our passage. <sup>33</sup>Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East came together, and crossing the Jordan they encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. <sup>34</sup>But the spirit of the LORD took possession of Gideon; and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him. <sup>35</sup>He sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, and they too were called out to follow him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they went up to meet them." The Midianites and the Amalekites are ready to kill Gideon for his despicable actions in their eyes. BUT, the spirit of the Lord comes upon Gideon and he rallies warriors from all these different tribes. It was originally going to be Gideon against an army. And it has now turned out to be much more than that.

Now, you would think that having all these tribes join him for battle, would be enough affirmation that this is the calling of the Lord, right? You would think that receiving the call from an angel for this task would be enough, right? But no, it's not enough for Gideon. So He asks for signs from the Lord. On one hand, this shows Gideon's lack of confidence and faith in the call and lack of faith in God. On the other hand, sometimes we all need some signs to affirm the direction of the Lord. <sup>36</sup>Then Gideon said to God, 'In order to see whether you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said, <sup>37</sup>I am going to lay a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said.' <sup>38</sup>And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. <sup>39</sup>Then Gideon said to God, 'Do not let your anger burn against me, let me speak one more time; let me, please, make trial with the fleece just once more; let it be dry only on the fleece, and on all the ground let there be dew.' <sup>40</sup>And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew." The first time around with the fleece and dew, it wasn't all that miraculous because this is what would normally happen. So it isn't much of a sign. So that's why the second time around Gideon asks for the opposite to happen and he receives the sign he needs.

This is no small army of Gideons. In chapter 7, verse 3, it indicates that he had 32,000 troops. Out of a nation that is in slavery to the Midianites, that's incredible! These people are ready to fight for a righteous cause. Gideon should be feeling pretty confident about himself right now. But then the Lord starts to do some strange stuff. Backing up to verse 2, <sup>2</sup>The LORD said to Gideon, "The troops with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand. Israel would only take the credit away from me, saying, 'My own hand has delivered me.'" What? God wants to shrink an army? Who, in their right mind, would shrink an army before battle? But it gets even better after this first reduction, <sup>4</sup>Then the LORD said to Gideon, "The troops are still too many; take them down to

the water and I will sift them out for you there. When I say, ‘This one shall go with you,’ he shall go with you; and when I say, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ he shall not go.’<sup>5</sup> So he brought the troops down to the water; and the LORD said to Gideon, ‘All those who lap the water with their tongues, as a dog laps, you shall put to one side; all those who kneel down to drink, putting their hands to their mouths, you shall put to the other side.’<sup>6</sup> The number of those that lapped was three hundred; but all the rest of the troops knelt down to drink water.” What a strange way to determine who stays and who goes?!?! And now they went from 32,000 troops to 300. Why? All because the Lord didn’t want the Israelites to take credit for the victory that is to come. Remember? This is what I talked about in our first week of studying Judges, when we experience the blessing of the Lord, 32,000 troops, it’s easy to shift from “Look at what He did!” to “Look at what I did.”

And guess what? The Lord tries to prevent Gideon and the army from taking credit, but Gideon shifts from “Look at what He did!” to “Look at what WE did!” He’s gradually making the shift from feeble and timid Gideon to self-absorbed, confident Gideon. After the Lord tells Gideon that it’s time to attack the Midianites and Amalekites, watch what happens as Gideon relays the message from the Lord in verse 18. “<sup>18</sup>When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the trumpets around the whole camp, and shout, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon!’” “For the Lord AND for Gideon!” This isn’t just about the Lord’s glory anymore. It’s also about Gideon’s glory. This scene echoes the battle of Jericho, when the Israelites first entered the promise land. Though, this time, the glory isn’t just for the Lord, Gideon is usurping God’s glory.

A few lessons come from this passage. One, you’ve already heard me talk about the other week. This is another warning not to claim God’s glory as your own. It will corrupt the blessing of God. And we see even more evidence of this after our passage. Gideon gets upset that the Ephraimites mocked him and didn’t help him conquer the Midianites. So upon conquering the kings of Midian, he returns to the city of Succoth and kills everyone in it for their disbelief and lack of support. And after that, Gideon requests golden earrings from his people so that he can make a golden garment called an “ephod.” Symbolizing Gideon’s “godly” nature. Do you think this calling and victory got to his head a little bit? Again, this is another step in that downward spiral in the book of Judges.

The main word from the Lord for today, I believe, is that He’s trying to encourage us. Many of us have come to believe that smallness equals shamefulness. That if we’re not big, we aren’t worth anything. But if we look at the biblical narrative, it is littered with stories of small people doing big things for God. Abraham was one man and he became the birthplace of a nation in Israel. The Israelites were a small group of people that conquered big armies. Three hundred men versus thousands. Through the faith of an unknown woman in Ruth,

she became the great great grandmother of the second greatest king in Israelite history in David. Who then eventually brought about centuries later the greatest king of all in our savior Jesus Christ. And in our story earlier, it was impossible to feed five thousand people, but through the generosity of a small boy with a small amount of food, Jesus fed them all. And through one man, whom we now know as our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, saves all of humanity from the depravity of sin and death through His sacrifice and death on the cross. Providence, if you don't believe God can work mighty and powerful things through our smallness, then you don't know our God. God loves smallness. Why? Because then we are reliant upon Him. That when God breaks through barriers and makes mighty things happen, we can't possibly argue that we did it. That miraculous works can only be done by the power of God. In our weakness, in our smallness, the Lord becomes our strength. To avoid, "My own hand has delivered me" to "my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, has delivered me." Because through His mighty work on the cross, we can proclaim the big things that God has done. Don't be ashamed to be small. Be proud to be small because that's when God does powerful and miraculous things. It's through the small that God works His mightiest of miracles.

Now, you might be saying, "I'm afraid." "I don't know what my future brings." "I'm afraid of what God is going to do." So, too, was Gideon. He needed a lot of reassurance. And God was gracious in his weakness. When Gideon asked for signs, God could have said, "Are you kidding me? Do I really have to do this to make you believe?" But God doesn't respond in that way. God responds graciously to Gideon's fear. The elders and I spent some extended time in prayer the other week in our monthly meeting. And I think to a degree, we're afraid. We're afraid because we don't know what's next for Providence Church. We want to know. We wish we could tell you. We wish we could tell you where this relationship with Abundant Life is going. But we don't know. And maybe your experiencing some of that fear and anxiety as well. But what we DO know, and it came out in every one of us as we listened for the voice of the Lord, is that in the midst fear, uncertainty and unknown, God has called us to trust Him. I'm sure God is working things that we are totally unaware of. I'm sure God is working great things out of our smallness, but it isn't time for us to know those things. So if you're feeling fear and uncertainty, then it's also a call to trust the Lord. In some ways, that's not reassuring. And if you want to call for signs of the Lord, go ahead. I'm sure He'll answer to give you reassurance. The Lord is gracious in this way. Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, "Courage is not the absence of fear but rather the assessment that something else is more important than fear." In our smallness and unknown future, God is calling us to trust His way and His voice more than to fear that unknown future.

Even Paul said, “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong,” 2 Corinthians 12:9–10. In his response to Paul, God is also giving us this same promise. That though we may be weak, He is strong. Maybe we can’t do the things that we used to do, but that’s a call for the Lord to be mightier and stronger than our strength. It’s a call for us to exercise big faith in the midst of smallness and weakness. That Christ’s power may rest on us. That great things don’t happen by our handy work. But by the Lord’s hand. The Lord sent 300 people to conquer Midian instead of 32,000. Why? So that we would know and acknowledge that our Lord is mighty. He is not one to contend with. That we can know and trust that God wants to do miraculous things through the small. Because then we can boast and testify of the glory of our God. We can testify in the midst of threats, weakness, struggles, barriers and sin, that our God is powerful. He is mighty. That we cannot deny that it is by the hand of God that victory can be proclaimed. It is by the hand of God than we can proclaim that we are forgiven by the blood of Jesus. It is by the hand of God, that His Kingdom can reign in our midst. It is by the hand of God that through Providence’s smallness, great and wonderful things will abound. By acknowledging His mighty hand in our midst, we can testify of the awesome power of our God. Amen.