

We find ourselves in the book of Judges. A book not so often preached on a book containing stories of chaos, violence, abuse a book that makes very graphic the worst side of humanity. The weakest side of humanity. The people of Israel have been freed out of slavery in Egypt. Yet now they find themselves without a constant direction. The times of Moses are gone, the times of Joshua are gone. Now the people of Israel find themselves in a phase where the great stories of the past are being forgotten. The great God of Abraham and Isaac is turning into a bedtime story of the past. In the past, God used to do all these miracles and He was mighty. Now, the people of Israel say: "We are being persecuted for who we are, in a place where we are not welcome, they say their god is stronger. They say they can provide real happiness. And to be honest, if you look into our situation, if you look into how we are being persecuted, and how the people around us look so much stronger, it seems to be so."

And so, the people of Israel assimilate to the other religions surrounding them. They betray their values for those surrounding them. For these other gods seem to be the real deal. Everybody is following them. People are forgetting where they come from and who they're actually meant to be. They're forgetting who they would've been, had they not met the God of Abraham. People are forgetting what sets apart the Hebrew God, Jehovah, the Great I am from the other gods. They do have leaders from time to time, so called judges. Some of them are pretty good, others are okay, others are bad and others are ridiculously bad. But throughout the book, we are going from pretty good to ridiculously bad. In today's passage, we find ourselves in a time after leader called Debora. Yes, in the bible we have women, let me rephrase that, in the much-criticized old testament, we have one of the few examples of female leadership is all literature in the antique. And she falls into the pretty good category in the book of Judges. And so, when we arrive in Judges chapter 6, the reader has high expectations after Debora. The people are now again without a leader. Away from God. Being persecuted. Their fields are being raided. They are hiding in the mountains, caves.

But in the midst of confusion, oppression, rejection, lack of leadership, God raises...a coward?

That leads me to my first point: Things are not what they seem to be.

Judges 6:11 Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites. (NIV)

First, Gideon's low family status. Although we know that Gideon's family was most likely wealthy and they had servants, Gideon is the one doing the dirty work. If you have servants, you don't beat the wheat yourself. He says in verse 15: "I am the least in my family." Beating out wheat, even under ideal conditions, was a messy, dirty job and the poor Gideon was doing it in a wine press. Second, doing this in a wine press is a clear sign of uncertain times. You don't beat wheat in a wine press. You do it on a hilltop, so when you toss the wheat into the air, the wind

separates the chaff or waste from the grain. Grain falls on the floor and the waste is carried away by the wind. Here, however, Gideon is on the opposite of a hilltop, most likely a dugout hole. Making his life much harder, inefficient and slower out of fear from the Midianites.

Things don't seem too good.

Not only is Gideon humbled by his wealthy family, but he is also surrounded by fear. Perhaps he was raided before. Perhaps in the oppressive situation he lived in, someone hurt him, bullied him. It has been seven years of oppression. He is not able to be in the open anymore. The fear, disappointment, mistrust and failures have been too great, and now, they detain him. They control him. How much have we allowed fear and mistrust to swallow us? How much freedom did we allow fear to take away from us? How long have we close ourselves to others, to God, because mistrust held our smile back? How much more could we have done, if we could have trusted? Times of oppression.

But things are not what they seem to be.

As we see in the same verse, the angel of the Lord was watching Gideon from under the oak tree. From all of the places. From all the people in the land. From all people sitting in high places, most "fitting" candidates, proud and full of trust. The angel of the LORD was watching the humble, Gideon, the least of his family, someone dominated by mistrust, beating out wheat in the wine press

Judges 6:12 The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, you mighty warrior." (NIV)

Although the angel of the LORD was watching Gideon, he only appears to him in a later point. *Things now seem to be different from another perspective.* Suddenly, Gideon seems not to have been alone all along. No matter if humbled beating wheat in a wine press. No matter if swallowed by fear. No matter how low he must have thought of himself all of those years. No matter how hopeless, he was now being called to give hope. No matter how currently incapable of trust. God was already calling him as what he ought to become a mighty warrior, deliverer of the nation, the topic of today's sermon at peace church 3 thousand years later.

Things are not what they seem to be from God's perspective

You might have lost the trust. You might be feeling as if you have been working in a wine press due to fear. But God has been watching you from the Oak tree. And no matter how low we might see ourselves; He calls mighty warriors. Suddenly our context does not define us.

Things are not what they seem to be from God's perspective

Yet, how difficult it is to accept God's perspective and give in to trust?

That leads me to my second point. Hold on to God's promise, hold on to God's perspective.

Judges 6:13 “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.” (NIV)

Some of us have been hurt for so long. We have at times trust someone or even God so much and still have passed through disappointments. Didn't we? It is so much easier to read and say it. Yet so difficult to accept it when we do feel alone. When we lose someone. When we thought that we would have a new chance, but this chance has been taken away from us. In our jobs, in our marriage, at the immigration office, with our health. When as young we had a dream to become someone successful, but now, due to life unexpected circumstances, we find ourselves working in a wine press.

But even there, hold on to God's promise, hold on to God's perspective

Brothers and sisters, the text does not show in any matter that Gideon changed his perspective after God called him a mighty warrior. Nor does God, with all His power and might change Gideon's mentality in the moment. No brainwashing there. Gideon actually tested God. And God with His mercy gave in to every single sign of proof that Gideon asked for. And yet, Gideon maintains his mistrust. He has second thoughts. He has third thoughts. He has fourth thoughts. Gideon's perspective on himself never really matches that of God's throughout his life. That is clear, especially in the end of his story. But still, God called this person with mistrust to deliver His people. No matter how unqualified, no matter the mistrust, Gideon learned to hold on to God's perspective about Him and not to his own perspective of himself. The key in Gideon's story, is that although he mistrusted God, although Gideon never really grasped what it was to trust the Lord. *God still kept His promise.* Even with Gideon doubting. Even Gideon testing God's trust over and over again. *God still kept His promise.* Even if the entire people of Israel, throughout the book of Judges abandoned God. He picked someone who felt abandoned, who felt humbled, who worked in a wine press beating wheat. To show that things are not what they seem to be from God's perspective. A perspective that said mighty warrior, Verse 16, I will be with you. “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” “I will wipe every tear from your eyes”

And as Isata sang today “Our future remains alive”