

Almighty God, Lord of hosts, encourage us with the assurance that You are with us always and that with You at our side, we never need fear. In the Savior's name, *strength and power* we pray. Amen. (The Lutheran Study Bible, CPH, 2009, p. 396 *adapted*)

Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. The LORD said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.'" Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained. And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' shall go with you, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' shall not go." So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink." And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men, but all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others go every man to his home." ... And he divided the 300 men into three companies and put trumpets into the hands of all of them and empty jars, with torches inside the jars. And he said to them, "Look at me, and do likewise. When I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then blow the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon. So Gideon and the hundred men 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. Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow. And they cried out, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" Every man stood in his place around the camp, and all the army ran. They cried out and fled.

In Christ Jesus, the perfect all-powerful Gideon who was raised up for our eternal deliverance, dear fellow redeemed:

What mother of a two year old has not had to hold her laughter within, when her recalcitrant child raised his or her voice in defiance insisting that a task could be accomplished without help and assistance. Whether it be getting the right shoe on the proper foot, or lifting or moving some object weighing many times more than the

child's mass or leverage could ever hope to budge. A false sense of ability fills the toddler's mind with imagined strength and power.

But the mother knows insisting that she knows better will not be received well. So if not harmful, she will allow the child to realize the futility of such foolhardy defiance in that second year of development. The child may not recognize at the time, but amidst the free flowing tears a lesson is learned and stored for future reference.

The children of Israel needed repeated reminders from whence their power and strength as a people came. Our text is another stark reminder of God miraculously granting them victory and deliverance. We too need the same repeated reminders, so let us observe: **God's People Overcome by Divine Power, Never Human.**

I

During times of national, state-wide and local community disasters, we hear much how we will get through these events, because we are strong. We hear such expressions as "*We will get through this together*", "*We got this!*", "*America Strong*", "*When things get tough, the tough get going.*" We understand such expressions working as encouragements. They can serve as earthly motivation, but if we are not careful they can become spiritually dangerous.

Consider Israel's first victory in the Promise land, the city of Jericho. It had God's power and strength written all over it. Yet, fresh from that obvious God-given victory, Israel went up against the small town of Ai, without God's command or promise and they were beaten back like an army that never trained for battle together. And of course, they were not a well-trained army at all. The victory at Jericho was by the most unconventional means but by divine power.

As we draw closer to Pentecost, our Gospel lessons increasingly point us to the working of the Spirit for Christ's Church. The power at work in the lives of Christians is the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son. It is common even among us, who should know better, to think it is by our own power we approach God and are able to make wise decisions inviting Him to be a part of our lives. That is so contrary to all of Scripture, and yet many in the outward Christian Church make such bold claims. How foolish we blind sinners can be in the face of our overwhelming weakness and inability to help ourselves even in the least bit spiritually.

God knows our foolish thoughts and feeble attempts to save ourselves. We read God telling Gideon in our text: "The people with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'" So our Lord pared down their number to go up against the Midianites from

32,000 to 300. It would be that small number, which would gain the victory over the much larger force arrayed against them. We are told that 135,000 Midianites were slain. Gideon's surprise attack at night caused such a melee that the Midianite army ended up in part killing many of their own. Numbers mean nothing before the Almighty Lord. No enemy of God's people are stronger than He.

II

We have some other famous battles of 300 or less fighters who took on much larger forces. The legendary Battle of Thermopylae about 700 years after this victory led by Gideon supposedly had 300 Spartans take on the much larger number of Persian invaders. After three days they lost the battle, but enabled the Greek army to take position to repel the invasion. Again about 3,000 years after our text there was the battle of the Alamo. It too became a lost battle by the small outnumbered fighters, but it did enable Sam Houston's Texan army to prepare for the victory against the Mexican army.

But all these heroic examples cannot begin to compare with what God empowered His people to do in the days of Gideon. However, there is still the greatest of all enemies arrayed against us today. St. Paul reminds us of the real battle that is constantly and currently taking place: "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" Our arms of flesh cannot withstand this overwhelming force, Satan and all the powers of hell.

If we lose to this enemy, it is not servitude and harassment for a 40-year period as in the age of Judges. It is an eternal subjection of unending grief and torment. You know what power alone is able to overcome this most formidable of all enemies, our Lord clearly tells us in the first chapter of Romans: "the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." This is the divine power that wins the victory for each and everyone of us personally. By this power at work in our lives – nothing has dominion over us. Sin, death and hell fall like the Midianites before us as our Lord forgives our sins and bestows upon us life and salvation.

Be aware that the Baals and Asheroth of today are still all around us. They were being trusted in by many of our neighbors, and do we dare to admit even by ourselves, prior to the Covid – 19 outbreak. The god of money in an economy that seemed to be growing without end was being trusted. The god of health and

medicine seemed so invincible. The average age of death was rising and the life of ease seemed so secure. But just as the Midianites overtook the Israelites for 40 years of subjection, so these present day gods seemed so invincible. These modern day gods' impotency is now exposed. Are we now helpless without them? Or is the Lord who has supplied eternal salvation from this broken and miserable world still all-powerful? Of course He is and by His power alone we are delivered.

God has sent His Gideon, His Son, for the whole human race. Although Gideon, the human judge raised up by God, was personally powerless, the real Gideon sent by God, Christ Jesus, had the power to destroy the common enemy of us all. By His perfect life Jesus supplied the body and life that could be sacrificed for us all. By His resurrection from the dead, sin, death and hell were defeated forever, once and for all. No mere human power could ever had accomplished this. But our God-Man Gideon overcame for us all.

A common image David used in his Psalms is when storms begin to gather, a mother bird will shelter her chicks under her protective wing, referred to as the shadow of her wing. Jesus Himself used a similar image of His desire to protect His people by gathering them under His wing. We may see it when the chick leaves the nest before it can fly and its mother must protect it on the ground. Spiritually you remain those powerless chicks or those two-year old toddlers, who may think you can handle things yourselves. But in truth it is your Savior God who alone provides the strength, power and might which alone saves for Jesus' sake. With the Psalmist you now get to sing: *"Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory."* (Ps. 115:1) He alone overcomes and gives you the victory. Amen.