

## **Sermon Text (Judges 7:1–7, 16–21)**

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.’ <sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.” <sup>5</sup> 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.” <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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.”

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And he said to them, “Look at me, and do likewise. 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 blow the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and shout, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon.’”

<sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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!” <sup>21</sup> Every man stood in his place around the camp, and all the army ran. They cried out and fled.

## **Thanks to God, our Victory Is Assured**

Last week, we heard an account that gave a summary of the period of the Judges. The author of the book of Judges summarizes the period in this way: “And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD . . . . So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. . . . Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. . . . But whenever the judge died, they

turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways” (Judges 2:11, 14, 16, 19). And so, this cycle repeated over and over again.

In our reading for today, we hear of one of the times that God saved his people using a judge that he had raised up. This judge’s name was Gideon. Our reading for today begins with Gideon and all of those who answered his call to fight “[rising] early and [encamping] beside the spring of Harod” (verse 1). The total number of men who answered Gideon’s call to fight were 32,000. However, this number paled in comparison to the number of men in the Midianite army, who numbered 135,000. Those odds already seem pretty grim, and yet, God 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’” (verse 2). Even though Gideon and his army were the clear underdogs in this fight, if they did manage to get an unexpected victory, then they could become overconfident and arrogant, thinking that it was all thanks to their own strength that they won. So, at God’s command, Gideon said to his men, “‘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” (verse 3).

Now, the odds were stacked against Gideon and his army even more, and yet, God said to Gideon, “The people are still too many” (verse 4). So, at God’s command, Gideon took his remaining men down to water to drink. 300 of his men knelt down and scooped up the water to their mouths with their hands, possibly to keep their heads up so that they could keep an eye out for enemies. Meanwhile, the other 9,700 men got down on their hands and knees to drink. This would likely make cause them to react slower to an enemy attack. However, regardless of if the 300 were the ones who were more prepared to fight while they drank or not, God used this to

significantly reduce the number of men fighting in Gideon's army. The odds were already bad enough, but now they were outnumbered 450 to 1, and yet, God said to Gideon, "With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand" (verse 7).

And it happened just as God said. The 300 men were divided into three companies, and they each held a trumpet in their right hand and a torch covered by a jar in their left hand. When they came to the outskirts of the Midianite camp at the beginning of the middle watch, between 10:00 PM and 2:00 AM, Gideon and his company blew their trumpets and smashed their jars, revealing the light of their torches. Then, the other companies did the same, and all three of the companies yelled, "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" (verses 20–21). The Midianites even began to kill each other as they fled, for "[w]hen [Gideon and his army] blew the 300 trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army" (Judges 7:22). Without even raising a sword, Gideon and his army were victorious. This truly was a victory that could have only been won by God.

There is a fight that we all engage in that also has impossible odds. However, this is not a fight against a physical army. This is a spiritual battle against the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature. These spiritual enemies do everything in their power to get us to fall into temptation and fall away from God. And if the odds against Gideon and his army seemed great, that is nothing compared to the odds against us in our battle against our spiritual enemies. In fact, we fell to them the moment we were conceived, and we became their captives, doing whatever sinful act that they willed us to do.

However, even though we fell to our spiritual enemies, the battle was not lost. Just as God gave Gideon and his army the victory over their enemies in an unexpected and improbable way,

so God gave us the victory over our spiritual enemies in an unexpected and improbable way. The way that God gave us the victory at first seemed like it was a defeat. Jesus, having done nothing wrong, was arrested, humiliated, and sentenced to death. After three years of teaching the people and helping those who needed him, Jesus hung on the cross as if he was a common criminal. And yet, it was through that death that the victory was won.

In order to save us from our sins, a substitute was needed. Jesus was our substitute, living the perfect life that we could not and then dying the death that we rightfully deserved for our sins. With the shedding of Jesus' innocent blood, the payment that was needed was paid in full, and our spiritual enemies were defeated. This victory was made certain three days after Jesus' death when he rose again from the dead. Death could not hold him, because he destroyed death. Therefore, death cannot hold us either, and we will one day rise to enjoy the victory that he won for us in the kingdom of heaven for all eternity. Just as the victory that Gideon and his army received could only have come from God, the victory that we received could also only have come from God, and yet, there are still times when we can be tempted to believe that we play a role in our salvation, even if it is in the smallest of ways.

We can be tempted to think that, if we do enough good works, the good that we do will outweigh the bad. However, no matter how many good works we do, we can never tip the scales in our favor. We can also be tempted to think that, even if we can't outweigh the sins that we have committed, we could still do enough good works that we will eventually have done enough to get into heaven. However, we can never do enough good works to get into heaven so long as there is even one sin that we have committed. Finally, we can be tempted to think that, even if we can't do enough good works to earn ourselves a place in heaven, so long as we are better people than others

are, then God will welcome us into heaven. However, it doesn't matter how good we are compared to others, because we still will never be good enough.

Even if we don't think in these three ways, we can still be tempted to think that we can, at the very least, make a decision to come to faith in Jesus. That's surely how we can contribute, right? However, we can't even do that. As the apostle Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, "You were dead in the trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1), and if someone is dead, then they can't make any decisions at all.

We, by nature, feel like we have to do something to contribute to our salvation. However, if it were up to us, then we would have no hope at all. We would be crushed like a small army going up against the biggest army in the world. Thankfully, it is not up to us. It is all thanks to God and God alone that we are saved. Just like how Gideon and his army could not take the credit for their victory, so we cannot take the credit for our victory. As the apostle Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9).

When we are faced with impossible odds of being saved, we are saved by God. He saves us through the waters of holy baptism, through which our sins are washed away and the Holy Spirit enters into our hearts and creates the saving faith that we need to believe in Jesus. And we continue to come back to the Word throughout our lives to hear the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection so that the Holy Spirit may work through that Word to strengthen our faith. It truly is completely the work of God that the victory is ours. And, even though we may want to know that we did something to contribute to our salvation, knowing that everything has already been finished by Jesus and that we are preserved in our faith by the Holy Spirit to this day offers us the greatest comfort that we could possibly have, because, thanks to God, our victory is assured.