

**August 13, 2017**

**TEXT: Judges 6:11–24**

**TITLE: Judges' Wisdom: A Questionable Call**

It has often been said the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, expecting a different result. Israel's behavior and relationship with God was the epitome of this definition. The scripture passage Kirk read earlier states: "*The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian for seven years. The hand of Midian prevailed over Israel....*" (Judges 6:1–2) We don't like to think that God allows troubles and tribulations to enter into our lives as a result of our behavior—yet, for every action there is a reaction and our negative behavior often results in a negative reaction.

Our country is in the midst a negative reaction, based on the outcome of the most recent presidential election. We are no longer considered a world leader by many other democratic countries. It was recently reported that many of our allies consider our president to be immature, not well-learned, someone to be ridiculed; and we know how he has recently responded to North Korea's behavior, promising "fire, fury and power beyond that which the world has ever seen." Not to mention that many of his followers are now running amuck, spewing hatred, bigotry and violence across the country and most recently demonstrated in Charlottesville, Virginia.

God's chosen people, the Israelites, had run amuck: chasing after other gods, assimilating and imitating others, and as a result of their covenantal faithlessness towards God, they were living under the oppression of the Midianites, who released their own brand of fury, and power on them. The Midianites ravaged and destroyed the Israelite's crops, stole their cattle and drove them into hiding in the mountains and caves. Crying out to their Lord to save them, the Lord commissioned Gideon, to deliver Israel from their oppressor.

Nothing is ever as straight-forward as we would like to think. Our relationships with people, situations, countries, and God can change overtime. Israel had a complicated relationship with Midian—Moses is described as having a close, positive relationship with the tribe of Midian, even marrying a Midianite women. Other times, the Midianites were described as Israel's enemy and oppressor. Lawrence Stager, a commentator suggested: "The 'benign relations' between the Midianites and Moses' group reflects the sociohistorical situation before 1100 B.C.E., whereas Judges 6 reflects a time when 'camel-riding and –raiding Midianites had become archenemies of the Israelites'." (Nuditch, Susan; the Old Testament Library, Judges. Westminster John Knox Press, 2008, 89.)

Literally and figuratively oppressed, the Israelites were pushed to the margins, hiding in the side of mountains, crying out to God for relief. God responded, sending an unnamed prophet, to remind them of their history and God's faithfulness towards them over the years, in spite of their faithlessness. It was that same unnamed prophet, a messenger from God, who appeared to Gideon, while he was hiding, beating wheat in a winepress.

Gideon was hiding, hopeful that the grain he was processing would not be discovered and destroyed or stolen by the Midianites. God's messenger addressed Gideon as mighty warrior, a man of valor, a judge called to lead God's chosen out of their oppression and to direct them back to the God of their salvation.

Mighty warriors, man of valor, judge are not titles that describe a man in hiding. We expect people operating in those positions and professions to be larger than life, unafraid, persons with big personalities and personas. And yet again, things or people aren't always as they seem or appear. It's often the quiet, unassuming person, shy and reluctant who has the strength, character and faith in God to bring about change, to lead a nation, to release others and themselves from captivity. Those who talk loud are often saying nothing! We witness that daily, 140 characters at a time! Brothers and sisters, God *"uses the foolishness of this world to shame the world and weak things to shame the strong."* (1 Cor. 1:27)

Gideon's call is reminiscent of others God has called, whom from in our and their own estimation, weren't up to or worthy of that which God had placed before them. Moses and Abraham, called to lead God's people, both initially refused their commission; Moses because he was unable to communicate clearly and Abraham because he was too old to father a child. Gideon's hesitation can be summed up by his question to the messenger: *"if God is with us, why have we encountered all this oppression; and where are all the wonderful acts our ancestors' spoke of; why has God given us into the hands of the Midianites?"*

As I watched the news yesterday afternoon, and witnessed the unfolding of the violence, hatred, racism and bigotry, resulting in the loss of three lives and many being hurt, many questions were on my heart and I imagine some of you felt and feel the same way. If God is with us, why is racism overwhelmingly overt, unabashedly and unapologetically perpetuated and being exhibited by White nationalist, Nazi's, and KKK members marching in the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia shouting, "one people, one nation, end immigration;" and demanding the return of their country to "the white founding fathers who are being defamed, smeared and torn down?"

Where is God, when people, marching in the name of God are preaching marginalization, nationalism, hatred and discrimination with tiki torches in their hands by night and in broad day light carrying Confederate and Nazi flags terrorizing people who they deem as less than themselves without any shame, embarrassment or recrimination? Are there any Deborah's, Ehud's and Gideon's being called and commissioned to lead us out of all this confusion, modern-day oppression and lawlessness?

Unlike the prophet Isaiah, who responded boldly and without hesitation, "here I am, send me" upon hearing the Lord God engaged in a heavenly conversation, asking "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us, Gideon raised another question and issue: *"By what means will I deliver Israel, considering my family is the poorest in Manasseh and I am the youngest in the family;"* and God answers, "go in your own might, I have

called you, I am with you.” 2 Timothy 1:7, reassures us; “God did not give us a spirit of cowardice or fear, but rather a spirit of power, or love and of self-discipline.”

Brothers and sisters, it's time for us to stop standing on the sidelines, hiding in our safe places, asking questions and to boldly volunteer to stand up for righteousness, for justice, peace, and reconciliation. If not us, then who, and if not now, when? Throughout history, God has issued questionable calls to questionable men and women to lead us into a beloved community; a community, a nation, a world, where people are not judged, terrorized, or marginalized, but loved. Period!

Questionable calls were issued and answered by Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, Emmitt Till, Rosa Parks, The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Questionable calls were answered by: Virginia Foster Durr, a southern, white, housewife and political activist who fought against the poll-tax and southern white male dominance; by J. Waties Waring, a federal judge from South Carolina who opened white primary elections to black people; by Anne McCarty Braden, journalist and community organizer in Louisville, Kentucky, who defied racists real estate practices and the House Unamerican Activities Committee and organized white southerners to support the civil rights movement.

A questionable call has been answered by modern-day prophet and proclaimer, the Rev. Dr. William Barber, President of the NAACP, Repairers of the Breach, and the leader of Moral Mondays in North Carolina, who tweeted just hours ago:

“Mr President, you & those who have fostered lies and sown seed of racism must repent both in terms of talk & policies; You have sown the seeds of hate & attacked almost everything President Obama did in ways that have deep racial overtones; And we who believe in love & justice for all must in the most nonviolent ways continue to pray, protest and push for a better world.”

So many others, unnamed and unknown, answered the call of God to stand up, to lead God's people out of darkness into light, to fight against oppression, bigotry, prejudice, violence and injustice; to go in their own strength, with the reassurance that they are not alone; and when faced with opposition, pushed down and even trampled upon, to stand back up for “I am” is with them. “I am” the one who promised to never leave nor forsake us; “I am,” who promised to be with us until the ends of the age; “I am” who promised and sent the Holy Spirit to comfort, keep and empower us.

Just as the apostle Paul was assured that God's grace is sufficient and God's power is made perfect in our weakness. May that be our assurance as well? It is in our weakness that God's perfection is made known. Brothers and sisters answer God's questionable call today—stand for that what is right; speak peace into violent and harmful situations; exhibit and be the love that transcends anything that would seek to divide. Gideon and so many others were reluctant judges, men and women called by God to free God's people, to defeat enemies, to lead into lands of promise, to usher in the kingdom of God

on earth. In the Garden of Gethsemane, even Jesus questioned God's call for him to die on the cross, and praying his response was "not my will, but thy will be done."

May God's will be done in each of our lives, in our country and in this world. However, it will only be done, if we God's people, called by God's name humble ourselves, pray, seek God's presence, turn back to the only holy, wise, gracious and merciful God, and turn from our wicked ways, then we will hear from heaven, our sins will be forgiven and our land will be healed. (2 Chron. 7:14) Beloved, that is answer to all our questions. "I am" has called, commissioned and is with us, it's time to for us to answer.

Amen.