

Sermon #1,020: Judges 6:25-32, 6:36-7:2

4-28-13 (Cantate, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Easter), Bethany-Princeton MN

### GOD CALLS PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN INDIVIDUALLY

Prayer: Almighty God, we humbly ask You: Send Your Holy Spirit into our hearts, that He may rule and direct us according to Your will; comfort us in all our temptations and afflictions, defend us from all error, and lead us into all truth, that we, being steadfast in the faith, may increase in love and in all good works, and in the end obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen. (*Prayer on the Gospel for Cantate Sunday, from The Lutheran Liturgy*)

In the name of Jesus, the faithful Son of the heavenly Father, fellow redeemed:

We think of Gideon as a great hero of the faith. Of course, he is more than that; as one of the judges who delivered Israel from its enemies, he is a preview of Jesus, who saved everyone out of the clutches of the devil and death.

This comes out clearly in Judges 7, when Gideon saves not by might or power, but routs the host of Midian with a mere 300 men who do the rather un-military maneuver of blowing horns, breaking pitchers and shouting. They put Midian to the sword, but it is not by the sword that Gideon saves them. This is like Jesus, who conquered the devil's kingdom by the despised, seemingly weak method of dying on a cross. In chapter 7 Gideon does what God sent him to do.

But he doesn't always look like such a strong leader. Actually, in chapter 6 Gideon doesn't look like much of a hero at all. In spite of the Angel of the LORD, God Himself, appearing to Gideon face to face, even doing a powerful miracle in the presence of Gideon, whom does he show himself to be more afraid of? Almighty God or the opinions of his neighbors? As usual with these Bible saints, Gideon disappoints us. When it comes time to pull down the altars to false gods, Gideon is too afraid to do it in front of others. He does it at night. He's afraid of their opinions, afraid to make enemies, perhaps afraid of being called a hypocrite, since actually it's his family who owned the idol-worshipping altars. Even

after it turns out well and he is protected from neighbors who at first wanted to kill him, Gideon's halting, unsure, doubt-filled ways continue: he makes God perform miracles involving morning dew and a fleece, over two nights, before he will believe that God really will win the battle with the Midianites for Gideon.

Why is it so hard for Gideon? It isn't only that he is a weak, sinful human being, something you can say about everybody. At some point you have to quit with the generalities. The devil does not deal in generalities. He knows the specific weakness of each person, and Gideon has some very specific vulnerabilities.

In his case, as you heard, the altars to false gods were his own family's. It's some kind of a good sign that when the neighbors wanted to kill Gideon it was his father who stood by him and defended him. We don't absolutely know how strongly old Joash felt about the Baal altar, whether it was inherited and he just let things go on as they were. But prior to that moment he had done his son no favors. He did nothing to discourage the Baal worship, when he was in position to do so. If you inherit idolatrous behavior, and you just want to be Minnesota Nice and not make waves while people thumb their nose at God, you aren't with God; you're against Him. That's Gideon's dad. At the very least, up to that point in Gideon's life his father and his family had a "live and let live" attitude about the false worship around them. At the worst, they participated in it. It's obvious that many people there defended the presence of these idols. Perhaps they were the pride of the city. Gideon knew chopping down the altar to Baal and the pole dedicated to the goddess Ashtoreth would make him the most unpopular person in town. He said to himself, "I'll do it in the dark when everyone is sleeping."

What you can conclude from this is that, in spite of his knowing without a doubt that God Himself was calling and sending him to do His will, Gideon found it very difficult to overcome his surroundings.

Suddenly this doesn't seem like a story from the ancient world. It's pretty up-to-date. It's timely on this Sunday, when we've heard two teen-agers confess what they believe. A week from today Jamie and Jenessa will be confirmed. They will make promises. What they've done today in answering questions is just as much a public confessing of their faith. They are to be saying out loud what they believe in their hearts. What they said today, and last January when they were questioned on the Commandments and the Creed, goes completely against the culture. These are truths that are despised by the world they (and we) live in.

Today among other things they declared that you can only pray to the Triune God, babies are to be baptized, only men can be pastors, that God's forgiveness and holy communion are not to be given to those who refuse to repent, that the Lord's Supper is only for those who believe the same Biblical teachings, and that they are to forgive everyone who sins against them regardless of the sin.

Jamie and Jenessa, what you've learned in a sanctuary and in a classroom is tested by your surroundings. You don't have it any easier than Gideon did. If you go through life expecting the world to applaud your faithfulness to God's Word, you'll be disappointed. But we can't just think of this in general terms, as if "the world" is nameless and faceless. Learn from Gideon. He knew the names and the faces of those who turned against him. It even involved family members. It was uncomfortable. That's the word I guess I want to emphasize: *uncomfortable*.

This is what beats so many Christians into submission. It kept Gideon's father silent about the altar to Baal. It made Gideon wait till nightfall to do God's will: how actually practicing the one true faith makes you feel uncomfortable, because so many whose names and faces you know respond so negatively to it and make you feel uncomfortable. This leads Christians to stay silent, or give in to those who do not share their faith. Your parents know what this is like.

We all do. Why don't Christians speak up against activities being scheduled on Sunday mornings by refusing to participate, or speak up against anti-Christian teaching in the public schools, or say what they believe when someone is expressing the validity of a contrary belief or lifestyle? Isn't it that it's uncomfortable to go against the crowd? It's hard to stand alone, to risk losing friends. When someone openly, unashamed, speaks of their sinful choices, lifestyle and behavior, you struggle to know whether to testify to God's truth. It isn't always the opportune time to do so, and we must try to win the person and not just win an argument, but if you stay silent you have to ask yourself honestly whether it's because you felt uncomfortable, if you acted ashamed of your Lord and His Word, and have to repent. The adults around you don't always do what they should when the world makes them uncomfortable.

But what this part of the Gideon story should teach you is not to let the sinful failures of others give you an excuse. Gideon too was without excuse.

What God is teaching here is that He calls each person individually. You are not saved by your parents' faith; *"the righteous shall live by his faith"* (Hab 2:4). You know your faith is not perfect. It never will be. This is why Jesus' faith was so important. He is the only one who perfectly trusted in His heavenly Father. He was faithful in all His house. You are saved not because of your faith, but because Jesus' perfect faith counts for you. This is what your faith relies on.

Jamie and Jenessa, God calls your parents individually and He calls you individually. He did this first in your baptism. Now as you confess your faith publicly, you are confessing your faith in Him. You do that also in how you live. He calls you to follow Him when it's uncomfortable. He calls your parents and all of us to follow Him when it's uncomfortable. When you don't do this, when anyone doesn't do this, He calls you to repent, He promises that through His

called servant He will forgive the sins of penitent sinners such as yourself, and He calls you to believe that this is happening in heaven at the same time.

I take it that when old Joash defended his son, and proudly gave him the nickname "**Jerub-baal**," meaning "he's against Baal," that he was repenting, he was accepting how uncomfortable faith in the true God made his existence in the world. Likewise, Gideon himself kept going forward, even if he did so slowly, because that is what the life of repentance and faith on this earth are like. You take a step forward, by your sin you take a step back, but you step forward to drown your sins in repentance. You come to the Lord's Supper even if you feel unworthy because of your sin, because the Lord's Supper forgives that very sin. Jesus' words, "*take, eat ... you drink of it,*" are always inviting you.

You see, God never stops calling and inviting you, no matter how old or how young you are. He never gives up on you. In the midst of such worldliness, God was still calling old Joash and He was calling his son Gideon, each to repent, believe and confess this faith. In the midst of our evil world, He is always still calling and tenderly inviting you to accept how uncomfortable this faith makes your existence in this world – because you receive His comfort of the Gospel, by which you have eternal comfort that no one can ever take from you. Amen!