

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier, Amen

Good morning! Thank you Julie for the invitation to preach today. It's week 2 of our series looking at people of the bible and today it's Gideon.

Now Julie said last week that almost everyone knows about Noah but I don't think Gideon is as well known, unless you went to Sunday School or a church school, which I didn't. So I am enjoying this opportunity to share some of his story with you! But first I want to set the scene - here's the history behind his story.

It is The Land - The promised land flowing with milk and honey. We call it Israel. God called Abraham from Ur along the Euphrates river to Haran and then southwards to the Land, where they settled among the Canaanites.. God said again "On your feet - get moving! Walk through the country, its length and breadth. I'm giving it to you!".

Abraham's grandson Jacob had 12 sons. One, the dreamer Joseph, was sold to slavers and ended in Egypt. You probably know the story - about Pharaoh's dreams which Joseph interpreted - famine is coming, get ready. Joseph became the emergency organiser and saved the day. His family left Canaan and joined him in Egypt. A later Pharaoh enslaved the Israelites. But God chose Moses to lead them out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, into the wilderness where they learnt to be God's people again. He was creator, deliverer, leader, healer, provider, lawgiver, judge, inspiration, and Moses' friend. One God was everything to them.

40 years later the slaves who left Egypt had become resilient nomads. The old ones had died. Led by Joshua they crossed over the Jordan and re-entered The Land, God's promised homeland. They had been away for 500 years!! But they had to fight for their home and many lives were lost. Because other people were already in the land. Over the years, they intermarried with the Canaanites and forgot their salvation story and their God. They worshipped the local gods, Baal the storm god and Astarte the mother goddess. No kings or leaders except when they were threatened by warlike tribes. . One leader was a woman, unusual for those days. She was called Deborah. Just thought I'd mention that! And she was followed 40 years later by Gideon, a remarkable man chosen by God, the one true God. I want to tell you about him and why his story just jumps off the page today!

in Gideon's day the Midianites - desert people from the east - were the problem . Coming into the land with their camels like locusts ,eating and destroying everything. The Israelites prayed to God and God sent an angel to tell Gideon to save Israel from Midian. Gideon wasn't sure about this angel with God's voice "Go in this strength that is yours. I'll be with you. Believe me, you'll defeat Midian!" . But Gideon put an offering of meat and bread before the angel - and

it was instantly burnt up. This angel was real. His family had an altar to Baal and a pole for Astarte. "Tear down the Baal altar" said God "Build me another one up on the hill and on it, offer me your dad's best bull. Light a fire under it and use the Astarte pole for firewood"

This was Gideon's first stage in becoming the rescuer. He now believed God and he **made a solemn choice - for God - and he had to go public**. Dad might be stropky about the bull, and Mum might mind about the pole but Gideon was chosen by God and he had to make a commitment to this God if he was to lead the Israelites to victory. The townspeople were stropky too but he won them over. Now he blew a trumpet to call the tribes together and they came.

But was Gideon ready ? Now that he was on God's side, he needed to be sure that he was God's choice to rescue Israel. He put out a fleece of wool on the floor and said to God "I'm leaving this fleece out overnight - in the morning if the ground is dry and the fleece is wet, I'll absolutely know you want me for this job" . It was !- soggy fleece and dry ground. Then with amazing pluck, he asked God again "Don't be impatient with me but to be absolutely absolutely sure, I'm putting the fleece out again - could you make the fleece dry and the ground wet this time!!" It was - dry fleece and soggy ground.

This was Gideon's second stage in becoming the rescuer. He was now **absolutely certain of God's call on him**.

Now he had gathered his troops - listen while Jeremy reads the next bit - it is from the translation called "The Message"

Gideon got up early the next morning, all his troops right there with him.

God said to Gideon, "You have too large an army with you. I can't turn Midian over to them like this -

they'll take all the credit, saying, 'I did it all myself,' and forget about me.

Make a public announcement: 'Anyone afraid, anyone who has any qualms at all, may leave Mount Gilead now and go home.'"

Twenty-two companies headed for home. Ten companies were left.

God said to Gideon: "There are still too many. Take them down to the stream and I'll make a final cut.

When I say, 'This one goes with you,' he'll go. When I say, 'This one doesn't go,' he won't go."

So Gideon took the troops down to the stream.

Three hundred lapped with their tongues from their cupped hands. All the rest knelt to drink.

God said to Gideon: "I'll use the three hundred men who lapped at the stream to save you and give Midian into your hands. All the rest may go home."

After Gideon took all their provisions and trumpets, he sent most of the Israelites home. He took up his position with the three hundred.
The camp of Midian stretched out below him in the valley.

This was Gideon's third stage in becoming the rescuer. He **now had so much trust in God that he wasn't impressed by numbers** but knew that a small crack force would be enough. Small is beautiful!

Now God told him to go down to the camp of Midian to hear the enemy. He and his armour-bearer overheard two friends saying that God had given the whole camp of Midian to Gideon - the Midianites were terrified. Jeremy is going to read what happens next

When Gideon heard this, he went to his knees before God in prayer.

Then he went back to the Israelite camp and said, "Get up and get going! God has just given us the Midianite army!"

He divided the three hundred men into three companies. He gave each man a trumpet and an empty jar, with a torch in the jar.

He said, "Watch me and do what I do. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly what I do.

When I and those with me blow the trumpets, you also, all around the camp, blow your trumpets and shout, 'For God and for Gideon!'"

Gideon and his hundred men got to the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after the sentries had been posted.

They blew the trumpets, at the same time smashing the jars they carried. All three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars.

They held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands, ready to blow, and shouted, "A sword for God and for Gideon!"

They were stationed all around the camp, each man at his post. The whole Midianite camp jumped to its feet. They yelled and fled.

When the three hundred blew the trumpets, God aimed each Midianite's sword against his companion, all over the camp. They ran for their lives

And this was Gideon's fourth stage in becoming the rescuer. **He used his own abilities and initiative** in using voices, trumpets and jars to give the impression of a huge horde. He was truly a clever and cunning leader and this way far fewer Israelites died than in battle. There were later battles but this was the climax . Afterwards there was peace for 40 years and Gideon lived a long life.

We live in a different age - probably 3000 years later than Gideon. Jesus' teaching is to live by non-violence wherever possible and to be peacemakers.

We now look back on our nation invading lands and settling in them as a difficult part of our colonial past. We find the strains between the wealth and expansion of today's Israel and the impoverished Palestinian settlements unjust. So the bible books Joshua and Judges are hard to read with a modern mindset.

But Gideon himself still sets us a great example for Christian life, especially in taking something on for God - maybe leadership or volunteering in church. Or a new job, which is a challenge for you but you sense God wants you to do. I think Gideon's 4 stages are really helpful:

1. make a solemn choice for God and go public - get to the point where you are really committed to God and his will for you. Let at least one other person know that you are making this decision

2. absolutely certain of God's call on you - when you pray, you can ask God to make it clear to you that you have heard his will correctly. Sometimes we need to ask "please block me, make it impossible for this to happen if it isn't your will". Or to talk it over with a wise spiritual companion or friend. Or your dreams may clarify the truth. You don't need a fleece of wool!

3. have so much trust in God that you aren't impressed by numbers - small is beautiful sometimes and certainly much more adaptable than large. Think of the size of churches - some are like yachts, others like cruise liners. But it is not just about size - it is also and more importantly about learning to find your security in God and not in what looks like earthly success. Trusting in God and obeying Him are essential and take a lifetime to learn.

4. use your own abilities and initiative - they are God given - as we learn to imitate Jesus, we don't become clones but more our unique selves.

Father God, give us the courage and commitment of Gideon, so that we may play our part in the coming of your kingdom, in Jesus' name. Amen