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Lent 3 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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Shadows of our Saviour
“Gideon – The Mighty Warrior”
Text: Judges 6-8; John 18:1-11

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Conventional military wisdom says that in order to win a battle, you should have more soldiers than your enemy. But if you do not have more soldiers, then you should have better soldiers. And if you do not have better soldiers, you should have superior weapons, superior technology, superior tactics. That’s the conventional wisdom. . . . And then there’s Gideon! And all that conventional wisdom gets thrown right out the window! And we see that God does not fight as we would fight. God does not do what we think would be most effective or what we think is best. God defies all conventional wisdom.

We heard part of the story of Gideon tonight, who God told to go and fight the Midianites. This is the nation that is terrorizing the people of Israel. Because of them, Israel was afraid. They were often forced to hide in mountains and caves. Their land was being overrun, the Midianites took their crops, and devastated their flocks and herds. And there were so many Midianites, we are told, that it was impossible to count them. They were *“as thick as locusts”* and the number of their camels was greater than the sands on the seashore. . . . And yet in spite of all of this, God tells Gideon to go and deliver His people.

And so it took a little bit of convincing on the part of God, but Gideon does go. And following conventional wisdom he takes with him as great a fighting force as he can muster – 32,000 men – which sounds like a lot, but was still a great deal less than the army of the Midianites. . . . But no, God tells him. You’re doing it wrong. You don’t have too few men, you have **too many** men! So God tells Gideon to let any of the men who are afraid go home. And 22,000 leave. Over two-thirds of Gideon’s men, leave and go home. . . . And so Gideon readies his now 10,000 man army, but once again God steps in. There are still too many people, God says. And He pares down the force even smaller, so that only 300 men are left. That meant that Midian would have over 400 men against each 1 man of Israel! No one in their right mind would go to battle against such

odds! Midian had every advantage – more soldiers, better soldiers, better weapons, better technology; they were faster, they were stronger.

Well as it turned out, Israel didn't even need the 300 men they had. In fact, they didn't have to fight at all. The Lord fought for them, and Midian was routed. For as we heard, as Gideon and his men simply held their positions, God confused the Midianites, and in their confusion and fear, they wound up killing each other! And by the end, over 120,000 swordsmen of Midian had fallen.

This is a “shadow of our Saviour.” In this victory, we see a shadow of what Jesus did for us. For like the people of Israel, you and I and all Christians have a great and powerful enemy seeking to terrorize us and overrun us – Satan and his forces. And they are more numerous than us, stronger than us, craftier than us, and have every advantage over us! . . . Except for one thing: we have a Gideon. The One who will fight *for us*. For consider the similarities between the battle led by Gideon and the battle led by our Saviour:

+ Both fought without great numbers, even though they both could easily have had great numbers to fight. God could have allowed Gideon to go into battle with all 32,000 men, and Jesus could have had much help as well. Remember what He told Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane: ***“Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?”*** . . . But God shows us His power in what looks like weakness, by paring down His fighting force against Satan to an absurdly low number. Even lower than 300. All the way down to one! His Son. To face off against Satan on the cross. . . . And is this not what God *told* Gideon He would do, when He said, ***“I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man.”***

+ In neither battle were any of the men lost. All 300 of Gideon's men were safe, and Jesus, as we heard in the Holy Gospel, made sure all of His own were safe as well.

+ And just like with Gideon, the enemy is thrown into confusion. It is God who is in control. For as we heard, when Jesus' opponents come to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Him, ***“when Jesus said, “I am He,” they drew back and all fell to the ground.”***

But just as with all of our shadows, even though there are many similarities, there is always a difference as well. And the difference here is that Jesus didn't kill those who were throw to the ground in confusion. He lets them live because they weren't really His enemies! That fight was still to come. . . . And so Jesus doesn't kill them. He let them get back up. He let them arrest Him and take Him away. Because unlike Gideon, Jesus' victory wasn't a victory just for a time, but for all time. And so for us, for His people of all times, Jesus had to ascend the cross and there fight for us. Against His real enemy.

Alone. As our “Mighty Warrior.” And even though a man nailed to a cross doesn’t look very powerful, He was . . . which His resurrection on Easter morning proved! He was stronger than the cross, stronger than our sin, stronger than the grave, and stronger than Satan. And it was a rout! Sin, death, and Satan defeated, once and for all!

So what is it that you are facing in your life right now? What enemies, what struggles of faith, what sins, what doubts and fears, what foes that seem to outnumber you? That seem to big to handle? That are wearing you down . . .

Whatever or whoever it is, it is no match for your Gideon, your Saviour, who has already won the victory for you on the cross! His life, death, and resurrection mean that for you and I and Christians of all times and places, we have a Gideon fighting for us. It may *seem*, at times, as if your enemy is stronger, but he is not. It may *seem*, at times, as if your enemy is winning, but he is not. For as the “Shadow of our Saviour” and our Saviour show us tonight, the One who fights for us is stronger than any who fight against us. The victory has been won. Your sins are forgiven. Your life, here and for eternity, is secure.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Word of God, From Days of Old
Tune: Rockingham Old (HS #853)

3. Gideon

The Word of God from days of old
The story of our Saviour told;
That in our sin and misery
Our hope and life our faith might see.

For Judah’s lion wins the strife
And reigns o’er death to give us life.
This Gideon shall for you arise,
Tho’ hidden yet from mortal eyes.

Be of good cheer; your cause belongs
To Him who can avenge your wrongs;
For though the foe seems awesome and great,

The Lord of Hosts will faith create.

Now through His Word and Sacrament,
Comes Christ, the Son from Heaven sent;
That pardon, peace, and victory,
Be ours – now and eternally.

To Thee, eternal Three in One,
Let homage meet by all be done
Whom by the cross Thou dost restore,
Preserve, and govern evermore.