

**LEARNING TO TRUST AGAIN**  
**Philippians 4:10-13**  
**Preached by Dr. Cahill**  
**Babcock Presbyterian Church**  
**Sunday, January 17, 2016**

By now you received a letter and pledge card explaining the budget deficit due to a decrease in revenue and the unanticipated, unbudgeted expenses for repairs to the building last year and even more expenses this year. I've been wondering why this is happening now just as we are moving forward with New Beginnings. It seems like a distraction to keep us from focusing our resources and energy on the future. It's easy to see the glass half empty instead of half full.

I have been reading and rereading the story of Gideon in the Book of Judges which I chose for the text for this morning's sermon. God instructed Gideon to shrink his army from 22,000 to 300 men before a crucial battle so it would be clear to everyone that God would come through for them if they trusted him to make all things possible. You'd agree this is a good story for us to hear today. We need to be reminded,

*"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."* (Philippians 4:13)

This is the Apostle Paul's witness of the will of God working through him during his years as a missionary for Christ. Paul wants us to know whenever he discerned what God wanted from him, even the impossible, God gave Paul a "can do" spirit to make it happen. How else do you explain the fast and furious spread of Christ's Gospel in an inhospitable world in such a short amount of time? God not only empowered Paul, God cleared the way, orchestrated events and through the Holy Spirit, changed hearts and minds to make Christ's Kingdom bubble up from nowhere throughout the Roman Empire.

Unfortunately some preachers today who should know better, use this verse to convince gullible people that they can do absolutely anything they want if they just put their minds to it. But nothing in this verse promises you can ask God to make possible your wildest dreams like, "God help me pick the right numbers so I can win the billion dollar lottery, and I promise if I win to give you ten percent back!"

Back to the point, this verse is actually about you and me submitting and being obedient to God's will. Only then are we primed to do whatever needs to be done to bring God's Kingdom to our neighborhood.

The story of Gideon in the Old Testament Book of Judges is an almost perfect template for the right application of Paul's declaration, *"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."*

Before telling Gideon's story we first need to set the historical context. A generation after the Exodus, Joshua, Moses' successor, led the Jews back into the Promised Land. Their return wasn't appreciated by the tribes of Midianites, Philistines and the others who lived on

the land before and during the Jews four-hundred years of bondage in Egypt. After the Jews fought their way back and retook possession of the land there was an uneasy peace interrupted by sporadic military campaigns between the warring tribes.

At this time in their history the Twelve Tribes of Israel were a loose confederation without a strong central government. That came later, first under Saul and then the House of King David. In the meantime, a strong ruler only emerged when there was a national emergency.

Now, before I continue I need to say something. Gideon was waging war to secure the Promised Land for the Jews but this story isn't a justification for holy war or claiming God is exclusively on our side. Instead, we should put this ancient story in its historical context and then leave it there. That was then, this is now.

Next we need to ask the question, what does this story have to say to us today that conforms with Christ's Gospel? The answer is there if we listen for God's Word emerging from the story. Listen hard and we can learn again why we need to trust in God especially when the odds are stacked against us. We can also hear God saying to us, "Trust me in all things. Be obedient to my will. You can do all things because I will strengthen you. Remember, I have already overcome the world. Your job is to take a deep breath, follow my lead and then just do it."

Let's now turn to the story found in The Book of Judges. Israel's enemies were ready to attack when an angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and said, "The Lord is with you..." Gideon answered, "But sir, if the Lord is with us why has all this happened to us and where are all the wonderful deeds our ancestors recounted to us say, "Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt? But now the Lord has cast us off."

Gideon is basically saying, "how is the Lord with us when we're faced with this imminent threat? Where is God now? Why did God bring us back here to face all these troubles?" These are honest questions that needed to be addressed before Gideon could move forward.

After a lot of persuading God convinced Gideon that he was the chosen one to deliver Israel from the present danger. But Gideon still wasn't totally convinced.

Read: Judges 6:36-38

Haven't you and I gone through this drill? "God, if you want me to go through with this, if you are really with me, to make sure I'm not making this up in my head, give me a sign. Give me proof, something to give me confidence. Help me to see everything is going to be all right.

The October after I graduated from college in 1974 I was still struggling with whether or not I was called to the ministry. Ever since I was in the seventh grade I wanted to be a history teacher but towards the end of my senior year I started getting the call not to be a teacher but a preacher. I was confused. "Lord give me a sign."

Soon after that I was driving home from work in the dark. “Lord, should I go to seminary or not?” Right away a feeling of awe and calm came over me along with the two words flashing through my thoughts, “Go ahead. Go ahead”

The next morning I convinced myself I worked myself into an emotional state and the words “go ahead” were from my own imagination. I was in good company, it was the same with Gideon.

Read Judges 6:39-40

God knows what we go through when we’re trying to make up our own minds especially when we’re confused and anxious. Thankfully God is patient and he comes back again and again to reassure us until we finally discern what God wants from us. That’s when the doors finally open and God shows us the way. But the path isn’t always clear and easy. Sometimes God challenges us to make sure we’re ready to go through with it. By that I mean are we ready to trust I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Read Judges 7:2-3

God instructed Gideon to cut his army in half, twelve thousand men were granted permission to go home if their hearts weren’t in it with no recriminations or questions asked. Maybe God knew these men were not meant to be soldiers, they would better serve God by returning to their families. But the primary reason was God wanted the Jews to know God would bring the victory. God wanted Gideon and his men to give God the glory. So only ten thousand remained. But God wasn’t through yet.

Read Judges 7:4-7

So God whittled down Gideon’s army of twenty-two thousand men to a mere three hundred to go against an army of whose number was “as countless as the sands of the seashore.” What was God up to?

I said earlier we need to find God’s Word to us emerging from the pages of this story and apply God’s word to; our present situations especially when times are tough. So, getting beyond the historical context of this story what message if God giving us in the present moment.

The first lesson we can learn is this: God uses our difficulties to get our attention. When everything seems calm and running smoothly we tend to sit and get comfortable. We tell ourselves we can handle it and we tend to stop depending on God or we convince ourselves God is here to keep hard times from happening. But when we hit the wall, after we panic, that’s when we can remind each other God is still in the mix, more than we realize. Tough times aren’t signs of God’s judgment. Tough times are signs of God’s grace. He loves us too much, he doesn’t want us to coast through life, he wants us to grow into life, closer to him so we can learn again to trust our lives to him. God tests us to show how strong and resourceful we can be. ‘I can do all things through him.’”

The next lesson we can learn from Gideon: God already knows everything about everything. God knows when we are hitting the wall and God knows how to get us through it. Once we calm down and quiet ourselves we can hear God's plan. This is not necessarily a solitary exercise. We need each other. That's why God gathers us together to be with and for each other. Two heads, three heads, six heads are better than one. That's why we meet on Sunday nights to pray together. In fact, the idea for this sermon came from last Sunday's prayer service. We discern God's will in community and we test God's will in community. We listen for the Holy Spirit to speak to us, encourage us and empower us through each other.

The next lesson" God reaffirms us. After Gideon asked the angel, "If the Lord is with us, why are these terrible things happening?" Gideon didn't get the answer he expected. Instead the angel declared, "Go in strength...I will be with you." God doesn't tell us why things happen, God just tells us to go in strength, trust in God and go with the flow. "I will be with you." As someone once said, "When God is all you got God is all you need."

Finally: The way things turnout is determined by God's will and not ours. We have to get it out of our heads that it's all on us. That's not how it works. That explains why God commanded Gideon to send all but three hundred men home. Gideon must have been apoplectic! Chapter 8 tells us there were 135,000 Midianites ready to pounce on them. I'm sure Gideon didn't like the odds. But you see God set up an impossible situation to prove Gideon could do the possible.

Especially today this is a lesson worth learning. What's impossible for us is possible with God, if we conform to his will. If Babcock Church is going to move forward, we can't be demoralized by the small size of our congregation or the balance sheet. Yes, we need to pay attention to these things but ultimately the Lord is out to glorify himself, for our own good. For that to happen, we need to submit to God, remember Jesus giving his life away for us and then go and do likewise. And know this, know it well, we're not doing this for Babcock Presbyterian Church, we're not doing this for us, we do this for Christ, his Kingdom and for our neighbors who need to be touched by the Gospel.

In conclusion, remember these lessons:

- 1) God uses our difficulties to get our attention. Has God got your attention?
- 2) God already knows we are hitting the wall and God already has a plan to get us through it. Are you ready to go through it?
- 3) What's impossible for us, on our own, is possible with God, if we have just enough trust and conform to his will.

Be in prayer and be of good cheer. Set aside your fears and doubts as God fills you with grace and power. Trust your life, Babcock's future and your future to God's sovereignty and never forget that tried and true formula.

*"I can do all things, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us."*

Amen.