

But listen to what God said to Gideon. **"Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die."** Gideon was so struck by those words that he built an altar right then and there and named it, *"The LORD Is Peace."* Gideon had asked for a sign, and he got it, a sign of peace. How often don't we wish that we could receive such a sign from God? My friends, we already have. We have the cross. On this altar of wood God sacrificed his only Son to pay for our sins. The cross, which meant agony, death, and hell for Jesus, means anything but for us; for us it means peace, joy, life, and heaven. We don't need a dazzling display of glory to convince us of God's love. We need only the cross, where we are assured that everything is right between God and us. For it is on the cross that **"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"** (Ro 5:8).

So what happened to Gideon? Did the worrier become the warrior? You'll have to come back next week to find out. Often that's how a series works. But you don't have to wait until then to know that there's no reason for you to be a worrier. You've been reminded that you have a God who listens to your cries for help and who answers them. He answers through his words and promises in the Bible. In fact, you have a God who sent you a Savior in the person of Jesus, the Angel of the Lord. He says to you, "Be at peace. I died for you, and I live for you." So be at peace, mighty warriors; the Lord is indeed with you. Amen.

Judges 6:1-24 – *Gideon: Warrior or Worrier?* – 175, 169, 419, 173
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Is Clark Kent a hero or an anti-hero? To Lois Lane, he's an anti-hero, isn't he? He's her bumbling and timid coworker at the Daily Planet. But Superman—now there's a hero. How about Peter Parker? To most who know him, he's a weak and conflicted anti-hero. But if you ask Mary Watson, who knows him as Spiderman, he's a real hero in the fight against crime. In both cases the anti-hero is the hero or, in the context of my sermon today, the worrier is the warrior.

Had these superheroes lived some 3000 years ago, Gideon could have identified with them. While Gideon never donned a costume or wore tights, he did win some pretty dramatic victories over the enemies of God's people. Even God called him "mighty warrior." But there was a "worrier" side to him, as well. As we begin a series on Gideon today, we're introduced to *Gideon's Gig*, or how a worrier becomes a warrior.

Gideon lived at a time of war and worry. The Midianites from east of the Jordan River made a regular habit of invading Israel. When they came, there were so many of them that they looked like swarms of locusts covering the land. There was nothing the Israelites could do but flee to the hills and take cover until the Midianites left. This went on for seven long years before the Israelites finally cried out to God for help. Why did it take seven years for them to do this?

Why does it take seven wrong turns for a guy to ask for directions? Pride. That's why, in the words of a retired seminary professor, *"The Lord's first move was to send a sermon rather than a military savior."* God sent a prophet, who came to the people and proclaimed: **"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians. And I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors; I drove them out before you and gave you their land. I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me."**

Although Gideon would later blame God for their hardships, the Israelites were the ones who were at fault. Even though God had saved them from slavery in Egypt and given them the rich land in which they were living, they had turned their backs on him. Instead of thanking and praising him, the Israelites prostrated themselves before the idols the Amorites had left behind. In fact, they did this even after the Midianites began their annual invasion of their land.

It's hard to figure out just what the Israelites were thinking but, if we're honest with ourselves, isn't it just as hard to figure out why we blame God (or someone else) when we find ourselves behind the 8-ball in life? While it's almost always our sin that gets us in trouble, we have the gall to suggest that it's God's fault for putting us there. We convince ourselves that, if God had done this or hadn't allowed that, then things would be different; then we'd be OK. And to complicate matters, what we do first is not turn to God for help. Instead, we try working things out on our own. How well did that work for the Israelites? They ended up spending seven years in mountain clefts and caves, all the while thinking that this was the only way they could be safe from their enemies. How in all the world could they have forgotten that God was their stronghold? How can we?

But the Israelites did forget, so God sent them a sermon instead of a savior. "Just like God," you think. "My pipes are spewing forth water. I call the plumber and, when he comes, he becomes a philosopher." God's no different than a nagging, I-told-you-so parent." But God "told them so" because they needed to face their sins and repent. Only then would they appreciate what God would do for them.

And what did God do? He sent the Angel of the Lord, a title often used for the Son of God in the Old Testament. The angel sat down under an oak tree. There he watched as Gideon separated the wheat from the chaff. What's interesting is that Gideon wasn't threshing out in the open, as was the common and most efficient practice. Instead, he was threshing the grain in a winepress. You see, Gideon didn't want a passing Midianite scout to spot him and take his wheat from him. Sounds more like a worrier than a warrior, doesn't it? And yet the Angel of the Lord said to Gideon, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior." That was too much for Gideon. "Pardon me, my lord," he replied, "but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."

Either Gideon hadn't heard the sermon the prophet had preached or he didn't believe it. As far as he was concerned, Israel's troubles were God's fault. If you were God, how would you have responded to such an insult? Amazingly, the angel didn't rebuke Gideon but responded with a word of grace. God can handle our doubts. He said: "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" There was no rebuke. There was no more preaching, just a divine commissioning: "Go! I am sending you."

But had the Angel of the Lord forgotten to whom he was speaking, that he was talking to a man who was threshing grain in a winepress, who was doing so because he was scared silly of the neighborhood bully? Gideon thought the angel had the wrong man. "Pardon me, my lord," he said, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." It reminds me of a similar conversation that took place on Mt. Horeb a few hundred years earlier, when Moses, too, thought God had the wrong guy. But God made it clear to both Moses and Gideon that it's not what you know but who you know that counts. God said to Gideon: "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive."

What comfort for us who strive in 21st century America to serve the Lord. How reassuring it is for us who are strong in all the wrong places and weak where we should be strong. How refreshing it is to know that God puts us where he wants us to be and equips us for the work he wants us to undertake. You and I will be more warrior than worrier when we remember that it's God who gives us our role and station in life, that it's God who calls us to be a parent, that it's God who places us in our classroom, that it's God who gives us our job. As someone once said, "The Lord does not seek from us what he has not given to us." God will equip us for every challenge we face.

But how could Gideon be sure of this? If only he could have a sign to assure him that this visitor was really divine. So he asked the angel to remain seated while he cooked a meal for him. The angel agreed and waited while Gideon kneaded some flour for bread, slaughtered a goat, prepared the meat, and boiled some soup. This was not a McDonald's Happy Meal, and yet the Angel of the Lord waited patiently. Why? It wasn't like the he needed the meal. Why wait around? Isn't it like the father in the Folger's TV commercial, who pauses on his way out the door when he sees the coffee mug his daughter made for him? Instead of a quick peck on the cheek, he pours the coffee from his travel mug into the mug she made for him and watches her draw a picture, as if he has all the time in the world for her. That's your heavenly Father. That's the father watching and waiting for the prodigal son. Because he loves his children, because he loves you, he has all the time in the world for you.

When Gideon finished preparing the meal, the angel told him to put the food on a rock, where he touched it with his staff. Instantly fire consumed everything, and the angel disappeared. Gideon wailed, "Alas, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!" Gideon thought he was going to die. No doubt, we would, too.