

Reformation Sunday
 October 30, 2016
 Judges 7:1-23

In Christ Jesus, through whom we have the victory over all of our enemies, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

So how did you do on your commitment from last week? Last week Joshua challenged us, **“Whom will you serve?”** Did you faithfully serve the Lord your God and Him only this past week? If you, with a repentant heart, have to acknowledge that you failed to do so throughout the week, you are not alone. All of us throughout this past week failed to live up to God’s Law of perfect obedience and faithfulness. And with the Israelites it was no different.

Last week we heard the Israelites cry out, **WE ALSO WILL SERVE THE LORD, FOR HE IS OUR GOD.** Remember how Joshua warned the people **YOU CANNOT SERVE THE LORD, FOR HE IS A HOLY GOD. HE IS A JEALOUS GOD; HE WILL NOT FORGIVE YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS NOR YOUR SINS. IF YOU FORSAKE THE LORD AND SERVE FOREIGN GODS, THEN HE WILL TURN AND DO YOU HARM AND CONSUME YOU, AFTER HE HAS DONE YOU GOOD.** But the people were insistent **NO, BUT WE WILL SERVE THE LORD!**

Well it didn’t take long for the Israelites to fail in their promises. In chapter 1 & 2 of the book of Judges we read of the Israelites not driving out all of the inhabitants of Canaan. It was too much work to keep on fighting, too much trouble to conquer all the nations, so they let some of them live. This led to treaties with them and eventually relationships and fellowship with them and then intermarrying with them and finally worshipping of their gods, idolatry.

In anger God speaks to them in Judges 2:1-3: **I LED YOU UP FROM EGYPT AND BROUGHT YOU TO THE LAND OF WHICH I SWORE TO YOUR FATHERS; AND I SAID, 'I WILL NEVER BREAK MY COVENANT WITH YOU. AND YOU SHALL MAKE NO COVENANT WITH THE INHABITANTS OF THIS LAND; YOU SHALL TEAR DOWN THEIR ALTARS.' BUT YOU HAVE NOT OBEYED MY VOICE. WHY HAVE YOU DONE THIS? THEREFORE I ALSO SAID, 'I WILL NOT DRIVE THEM OUT BEFORE YOU; BUT THEY SHALL BE THORNS IN YOUR SIDE, AND THEIR GODS SHALL BE A SNARE TO YOU.**

If you were to draw up a graph of the history during these days it would look like a roller coaster—up and down. The Israelites fell away, worshipped idols, rebelled against God. The Lord sent enemy armies to afflict them. The people repented and God raised up a Judge to deliver them. The people were faithful, and then the Judge died and the next generation would fall away and start the whole process all over again.

Our text takes place about 200 years after Joshua’s death. The Lord God had sent as a punishment upon His people, the powerful Midianites. For seven years there was constant warfare. Crops were burned; herds slaughtered; land stolen; homes destroyed. Many people resorted to living in caves and mountain clefts. Finally the people repented and turned to the LORD Jehovah for deliverance. The Lord out of mercy for the people sent them a deliverer; a man named Gideon!

Throughout our sermon text, one thing stands out very clear. It was the LORD who would free His people! They deserved the mess they were in. In fact they deserved far worse for their wicked disobedience, but now it would be God alone who would free them.

Gideon sent out an announcement **“the Lord will deliver His people, come join us!”** 32,000 men responded. Quite a good number of soldiers until you find out that the Midianites had 135,000 soldiers--more than 4 times their number. But that didn’t bother Gideon for the Lord was on his side.

But the Lord would do it His way. So the Lord increased the odds. He told Gideon to dismiss all of the soldiers who were afraid to fight the powerful Midianite army! 22,000 left and went home. Two-thirds of his army was now gone. He had only 10,000 left. The odds 13-1. 13 Midianite soldiers to every 1 Israelite soldier.

But the Lord said there were still too many. The odds weren’t preposterous enough, so as we read he had the army go to the water to drink. 9,700 men got down on their knees and drank straight out of the brook like a dog lapping water with their tongue. 300 brought the water up to their mouths cupped in

their hands while they still watched the land. The Lord chose those 300. What started out as an already undersized, yet formidable 32,000 man army now stood at 300. The odds 450-1. For every one Israelite soldier there were 450 Midianite soldiers.

Yet the Lord promised, **BY THE THREE HUNDRED MEN WHO LAPPED I WILL SAVE YOU, AND DELIVER THE MIDIANITES INTO YOUR HAND.** If 22,000 trembled with fear when there were 32,000 soldiers, imagine how these 300 felt. And yet we are not told of any, not even one who deserted, who balked or questioned the Lord. They no doubt wondered how God was going to accomplish the victory; but we're not told of any who doubted.

To assure Gideon of the victory the Lord led him to the Midianite camp and as we read Gideon overheard the dream of the barely loaf of bread tumbling into the Midianite camp and knocking down the tents. The Midianites looked down upon the Israelites as a lower class of people; ones who would eat barely bread while they ate wheat bread. The dream was clear, the barely eaters would destroy the wheat eaters---Midianites. The Midianite soldiers were filled with fear.

So how would you go about attacking 135,000 enemy soldiers with only 300 of your own? No doubt very carefully. You might use guerilla warfare tactics with sniper archers picking off a few at a time. You surely would not mount an offensive and boldly attack with so few. But remember, this was God's battle, not man's. This already preposterous battle got even more unbelievable when the Lord told Gideon and his men to attack the Midianite camp with only trumpets and jars with torches inside. They were not even to draw their sword out of their sheaths.

Try to put yourself into this situation. 135,000 soldiers stand a few feet away from you as you and 300 men intermittingly surround the camp. They are professional soldiers armed to the hilt; you have nothing but a trumpet, a jar pitcher and a sword in your belt. This type of gear was more appropriate for a parade, not a battle. Yet as we read in our sermon text, it was **THE SWORD OF THE LORD** that did the fighting.

When the Midianites heard the trumpets blowing, the jars smashing and saw the flickering lamps all around them, they began to wildly, blindly attack each other and then they fled for their homeland. One would think that after these professional soldiers would have regained their composure they would have stopped and counterattacked and easily defeated the 300 men, but remember this was the Lord's battle, not man's. The fear of the **SWORD OF THE LORD** filled the Midianites hearts until they were utterly defeated. Only 15,000 made it across the Jordan River. 120,000 were killed. Gideon and his men chased them down, captured their two kings and were victorious.

What were the odds? 450-1? Not really, since God was the one on Gideon's side there were no odds. For there was no chance of failure and defeat. And that is the important truth we would like to speak about on this Reformation Sunday.

This morning we are celebrating another battle. A battle that took place 499 years ago. A battle for the truth of God's Word, a battle to preserve the Scripture teaching that God alone saved mankind; that all people lost and dead in sin and destined for eternal damnation in hell have been saved by God's **GRACE ALONE**—His underserved love which sent His Son into this world as our only Savior to live and die for us. That we have this salvation by **FAITH ALONE**—not our works but our being led to cling to and trust all that Christ did for us. And this truth is found in **SCRIPTURE ALONE**—not in church decrees or man-made doctrines.

This battle for the truth really came out into the open on Oct. 31, 1517 when Martin Luther nailed those 95 theses on the church door in Wittenberg condemning the Catholic Church's selling of indulgences—pieces of paper signed by the Pope declaring time off in purgatory and a temporal forgiveness of sins—all for money.

Here was one lowly monk, with a few followers, against pope, emperor, priests and all of known Christendom at that time. The odds were even worse than Gideon and his men. At the Diet of Worms Luther was told to recant, take back all that he had written or face certain excommunication and very probably death as a heretic. But this one person with Christ at his side declared: **Unless I am convinced by Holy Scripture—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—for my conscience is taken captive by the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience. Here I stand. God help me. Amen.**

Luther was branded an outlaw by the church leaders and given 30 days safe passage before he was fair game to be executed. But by God's grace and protection Martin Luther's life was preserved and the Word of God was placed back into the hands of the common people and the Church was reformed. By

the time of Luther's death in 1546, the Gospel of full and free forgiveness and salvation alone through Jesus Christ was no longer hidden away and lost but proclaimed in churches and homes throughout Germany and much of Europe.

The first point we learn in our text this morning is:

WITH THE SWORD OF THE LORD

1) WE ARE NEVER TOO FEW IN NUMBER

It has been said that one man with courage makes a majority; well we can say that **ONE MAN WITH GOD MAKES A VICTORY!** Gideon and his 300 soldiers were not crazy to attempt such an attack; no, they were faithful! Martin Luther was not crazy or on a suicide mission when he took on the church of his day, he too was faithful to God. He stood up to far more powerful men than he; yet he prevailed because he was on God's side—the side of eternal truth!

What about each of us? Gideon's soldiers were **FEARFUL**—22,000 of them went back home; they were **FORGETFUL**---9,700 of them were not watching for the enemy when they bent down to drink water from the stream and some were **FAITHFUL**---300 of them went in to battle crying out **THE SWORD OF THE LORD AND OF GIDEON!**

Today only a few remain faithful, only a few go into battle unafraid, ever alert for the snare of Satan, this sinful world and their own sinful flesh. Only a few are found to be faithful soldiers, faithful warriors for Christ. If you are one of them, then you need never doubt that just because you and we are in the minority; just because there are less of us who fear, love and trust in the Lord Jesus who gave Himself on the cross for us; just because we are not powerful and prominent; we need never doubt that the victory is ours. Yes, the enemy is great and all around us—a self-centered hedonistic society, humanistic teachings everywhere, godless philosophy, evolution, immorality, pornography, materialism, gambling, greed, pride and a multitude more evils attack us everyday from the moment we get up in the morning until we lay our heads down to sleep.

But the **SWORD OF THE LORD**—His Powerful Word is on our side, in our hearts. His Word is what we base our teaching and our confidence on.

WITH THE SWORD OF THE LORD

2) WE NEVER LACK IN WEAPONRY

Gideon didn't use swords, shields, clubs, arrows or spears. He used the power of God. Luther didn't use human reason or philosophy, man-made teachings or papal decrees; but God's powerful Word. We don't use any of these things either in our battles to protect us and to spread the Good News. Paul tells us in Eph. 6: **PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD, THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO STAND AGAINST THE WILES OF THE DEVIL. FOR WE DO NOT WRESTLE AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD, BUT AGAINST PRINCIPALITIES, AGAINST POWERS, AGAINST THE RULERS OF THE DARKNESS OF THIS AGE, AGAINST SPIRITUAL HOSTS OF WICKEDNESS IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES. THEREFORE TAKE UP THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD, THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO WITHSTAND IN THE EVIL DAY, AND HAVING DONE ALL, TO STAND. STAND THEREFORE, HAVING GIRDED YOUR WAIST WITH TRUTH, HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND HAVING SHOD YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; ABOVE ALL, TAKING THE SHIELD OF FAITH WITH WHICH YOU WILL BE ABLE TO QUENCH ALL THE FIERY DARTS OF THE WICKED ONE. AND TAKE THE HELMET OF SALVATION, AND THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT, WHICH IS THE WORD OF GOD.**

WITH THE SWORD OF THE LORD

3) WE SHOULD NEVER DOUBT THE OUTCOME

So often you hear when someone dies, that they lost their battle with cancer, or with leukemia. If the person who died was a believer in Christ, he did not lose, he won, he won eternal life through Christ. How often hasn't our Lord given us promises such as **I will never leave you; I will deliver you; I will be with you always; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand; I will help you I will strengthen you.** We hear and learn these promises in our worship services, in our Bible classes, in our Sunday School and Confirmation, in our Christian Day School, in our own Bible devotions. Why do we still worry, fret, wonder, doubt, fear, and anguish over the future?

We can be assured of all of this as an individual Christian and as a Christian congregation because **THE SWORD OF THE LORD**---the all powerful Word of God declares it. His Word that promises--

and it is so. His Word that breathes new life into spiritually dead hearts. His Word that leads stubborn hearts to repentance. His Word that forgives all of our sins and gives the assurance of everlasting peace. His Word that tells us of another **ONE** who stood before a whole world of enemies and won—Jesus Christ.

Like Gideon and like Luther, Jesus stood against enormous odds—the powerful Roman Empire; the angry Jewish leaders; the unfaithful people; Satan and all the hosts of demons. There was no one who stood up to help Him. Even His Father forsook Him on the cross. His battle plan was even more preposterous than Gideon's. He would allow Himself to be captured, to suffer and be put to death. He would be condemned and damned by His Father and in dying He would win the victory. He died so that all could live. It appeared as if He had lost the battle on Good Friday, but He did that in order to win the war. For as God's Word promised **HE ROSE AGAIN** on the third day and lives and reigns to all eternity. One against all the evil forces of this world and He won!

Gideon didn't compromise God's Word. He faithfully followed Him into battle.

Luther didn't compromise God's Word. He faithfully stood his ground when surrounded by powerful forces and false teaching.

Jesus didn't escape the cross and suffering when given the chance. He endured the suffering, experienced death on the cross in order to save all people.

May we be moved by Christ's' great sacrifice to remain faithful followers of His Word; neither compromising His Word, nor fearing the outcome of the battles that are to take place, but put all of our confidence in **THE SWORD OF THE LORD---HIS POWERFUL WORD!** Amen.