

The Lord Is With You

"The Lord is with you." (Judges 6:12)

There is a passage in Proverbs 27 that reads, **"Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring,"** (v.1). How true that is. My college son plays baseball. Games were scheduled. They practiced hard. But you know how the weather was. Snow and then rain and he had several games canceled or postponed. Their schedule is all messed up as a result. We can make plans, but other forces change those plans for us. What a rough couple weeks you had. One day you were going about your normal routine and then the news came. Gary had to be rushed to the Hennepin Medical Center and before you could even digest the fact that he was sick, he died. Two weeks ago you didn't plan on sitting in church on a Friday evening, but here you are. It seems as though things are out of our control.

What could I say to you this morning? What hope could I give? We could talk about Gary, but that would be like cutting a flower and placing it in a vase of water. It smells and looks pretty for a while, but it will soon wilt and the petals will fall. We could talk about how short life is so we better enjoy it now. But that is a terrible philosophy of life. It has no hope. This is what the pagans and unbelievers do. There isn't much I could say, but there is something your Lord could say. That is why I chose this verse from the book of Judges for your comfort today, **"The Lord is with you."**

I. It is difficult to believe in God's presence in this tragedy.

"The Lord is with you." These words were spoken to a man many years ago who had a hard time believing them because it didn't look that way to him. The man's name was Gideon. We learn from Judges chapter six that the Angel of the Lord, an Old Testament term for the Son of God or Jesus Christ, appeared to Gideon while he was threshing wheat in a secret hiding place. And why was Gideon threshing wheat secretly? Because the land of Israel had been overrun by the Midianites. For seven years the Israelites lived in fear of the Midianites. Can you imagine making your meals in secret because you were afraid that some foreign police force might suddenly bust down the door and take your food, your money, maybe even your life? That is how Gideon and the Israelites lived. There was no hope of deliverance.

It wasn't always that way. God had many times delivered them from the hands of their oppressors. You remember the ten plagues in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the walls of Jericho crashing down, and so on. But these past seven years there was no sign of God's presence. Gideon and his fellow Israelites were convinced God had abandoned them.

You can imagine the shiver that went up Gideon's spine when a stranger suddenly appeared to him in his secret hiding place. But the stranger greeted Gideon, **"The Lord is with you."** This was too hard to believe. **"But sir,' Gideon replied, 'if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian.'"**

These words, **"The Lord is with you,"** sound just as out of place today. If I would have said those words to you two weeks ago, you would agree. "Yes, things are going fine, the Lord is with us." But now these words seem out of place. Where was the Lord when Gary needed him? We don't understand. Was God on vacation, gone, preoccupied, forgetful? Does he make promises he can't keep? Surely God isn't with us all the time, right? Wrong. The Lord is with you.

II. God reveals his presence to us in Christ Jesus.

In the case of Gideon, the Lord made it very plain he was with them. Gideon asked for some sort of sign. He then asked the stranger not to leave until he returned with an offering of some meat and bread. When he returned, the Angel of the Lord instructed him to place the offering on a rock. Then the Angel of Lord consumed the offering completely in fire and disappeared. He was the Lord. Though Gideon and the Israelites didn't believe it, the Lord had been with the whole time. Their prayers for help did not go unanswered. God saw their distress, only he was waiting for the perfect time to answer them. God revealed his plan and as it unfolded, Gideon and the Israelites saw God's mighty arm as he annihilated the Midianites. What seemed to them like a hopeless situation turned out to be one where God delivered them.

Dear friends, what God said to Gideon is also intended for you. In spite of all appearances to the contrary, the truth remains that the Lord is with you. Because God says so should be enough, but in our weakness we look for a sign like Gideon. And God gives you a sign. That sign is Jesus Christ. God saw how mankind is enslaved to sin and to death. But he didn't ignore us. Look at the manger in Bethlehem. Jesus Christ did indeed take on human flesh. He lived a perfect holy life for us. He died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. He rose to display his victory over death and promises that those who die in Christ will rise to eternal life.

Look at Jesus Christ who promised, **"I am with you always to the very end of the age."** God has not and will not forsake you. There was only person he completely forsook, and that was Jesus Christ when he became sin for us on the cross. There God forsook him to hell as payment for our sin so you and I are forgiven. As a result he will never leave us.

And like Gideon we can be sure that God has made a plan for all of us. He knows your distress. He hears your cries for help. And with a perfect, unsearchable wisdom he has a plan for you. In time we can and will see his plan unfold. We may have to wait until we walk out of our graves, but it will happen. So be patient.

There is only one other passage I want to share with you today. It comes from the Psalms, ***“Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.”*** A child may look upon his dinner plate and needs to be convinced that what is before him is tasty and good, so also we need to be reminded that the Lord is good. I think of the story of the prodigal son. Life with his father didn't seem all that exciting. So the young man who took his inheritance and wasted it on wine and women. When he was bankrupt and had nowhere to turn, he remembered how good it was when he lived with his father so he decided to go back. He didn't expect much. The best he hoped for was to become a slave in his own father's house. Yet, he went back, he saw his father's love as he was reinstated fully as a son.

Sometimes being with God doesn't seem all that exciting. We may even try to live life without him. There are times he seems light years away. But he isn't. Don't hesitate, especially in your grief, to go to your God, and then stay with him. He loves you so much that he sacrificed his son for your sins. Taste and see that the Lord is good. INJ Amen.