

**Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan**

**August 25, 2013**

**Judges 7:1-8**

*Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, announce now to the people, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.*

*But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go."*

*So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink." Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink. The LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place." So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others. Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley.*

One of my favorite shows to watch is a show on the Food Network called Restaurant Impossible. Restaurant Impossible is a show about a chef named Robert Irvine and his quest to help turn around failing restaurants. Each show goes something like this: We are introduced to a restaurant owner who owns a failing restaurant which is losing money big time. Robert Irvine's goal is to try and turn the restaurant around.

The restaurants which appear on the show are usually ugly, outdated and have terrible food. Chef Robert has \$10,000 dollars, his know how about food and a couple of assistants to try and help him refurbish the ugly restaurant and improve the food. He is given two days to try and help the owners out. The first day on the episode is tough and makes the owner cry. The second is better and the owner gets to open a redesigned restaurant hoping for success.

I think the idea of the show sort of applies to our lesson today. Israel has sinned against God and God has allowed her enemies to punish her. How bad was Israel's situation? We hear a chapter earlier, "Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds."

"Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys." Israel's situation was hopeless. The Israelites were powerless to resist their enemies. They were stuck in an impossible situation. They needed someone like Robert Irvine to come perform rescue impossible.

Who did they turn to in order to perform this rescue? "Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help." The Israelites called to the Lord and begged him for help. The Lord listened to their cries. He had mercy on them and called a man named Gideon to rescue them. Our story picks up in the middle of this rescue effort. Gideon is going about the task of gathering an army to attack Midianites and drive them out of the land.

This was a good start, however a few questions remained. How big was this army supposed to be? How would he choose who was going to be in this army? What about the people who were scared? Our lesson gives us some answers, "Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh."

"The LORD said to Gideon, 'You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, announce now to the people, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained. But the LORD said to Gideon, 'There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there.'"

"'If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go.' So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, 'Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink.' Three hundred men lapped

with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink. The LORD said to Gideon, 'With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands.'

"Let all the other men go, each to his own place." So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others." God helps Gideon trim the army down. First, he has Gideon get rid of those who were scared and 22,000 leave. Next, he designs a test by having the men drink water. Those who used their hand to drink the water so they could keep their eyes up and looking around could stay. The rest were to go home.

This test left 300 men in Gideon's army. Ok. Gideon has his army, but what kind of force was he facing? His army was going against an army of 135,000 men. Let me repeat that. His army was facing an army of 135,000 men. Do you understand why I call this situation rescue impossible? Gideon went from an army of 32,000, to 10,000 to finally 300. This means his army went from having roughly one soldier to the enemies four to having one soldier versus the enemies 450.

Why would God do this? Why would he reduce the army so much? Why would he take a situation where you might have a chance, where one guy only needs to kill four others, to one where it is impossible by asking one man to kill 450? God gives Gideon his reason in our lesson for today, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. Israel may...boast against me that her own strength has saved her." He didn't want Israel to brag she had saved herself without his help.

God used the mission of rescue impossible to show the Israelites he was the reason they were rescued. They were not. He didn't want them to become proud or boastful. He wanted them to worship him. Do you think God has ever acted this way with us? Do you think he has ever found us in a situation where he needs to perform rescue impossible? Some of you might see the link I'm thinking about. You might realize he already has rescued us from impossible place. He has rescued us from sin by Jesus' work.

But I wonder how often do we actually remember how desperately we needed to be rescued? How impossible the odds we faced really are? Do we always remember God rescued us because of his grace, love and mercy for us? Or do we think God "rescued" us and will let us into heaven because we are the member of the right church? Or God has rescued us because we are good looking enough? Or we are kind hearted? Or we are sincere? Or we are sorry enough over our sins? Or....you fill in the blank?

Our pride often blinds us to how much we need God's rescue impossible. We spend all week long hearing about how people do stupid things. We hear about the thief who got caught stealing or the murder who was convicted and got what he deserved. We see our coworkers lying. We deal with others who are mean and suddenly a little voice starts up inside of us. I'm not that bad. I deal with terrible people all week. God can't love them, but I'm not so bad. He is smart and right to love me.

What does God think about this attitude? "You have too much pride for me to deliver you from Satan. You may...boast against me that your own strength has saved you." God warns us our pride will destroy us. It will carry us away from him. The only way to gain God's favor is by being perfect and we can't do it. We are sinful by nature. No one is perfect. We sin every day. We sin in new ways. We sin in old ways. Has it hit you how impossible our odds are?

We desperately need rescue impossible. Guess what? God has provided it for us. Jesus faced odds much tougher than 450 to 1. He faced odds which are much stronger than an enemy army could ever be. Jesus faced every sin, ever committed of all time. He couldn't recruit someone to help him. He needed to fight this battle by himself. He needed to take on our pride. He needed to do away with our quiet self-righteous voice inside of us. He needed to complete rescue impossible.

God allowed Gideon's small army to defeat the Midianites. He threw off the yoke of their oppression and freed them from slavery. Jesus has done something much better. He has thrown the yoke of sin off of our necks. He has forgiven us from our sins of pride and arrogance. He has freed us from the need to put others down to make ourselves feel better about ourselves. He has rescued us to transform us and make us his children.

Isn't it amazing what Jesus has done with his rescue impossible? He has taken us out of an impossibly bad situation and put us in one which we cannot possibly make better. He did all of this despite the fact we are broken and battered sinners who wanted nothing to do with him. He completed rescue impossible even though we constantly run away from him. He willingly accomplished rescue impossible because he knew we were both unwilling and unable to do it.

Why would he do this? Why would he accomplish rescue impossible? It is because he loves us. He couldn't bear the thought of seeing us suffer under the weight of our sin. The best part? He doesn't even want anything in return. He doesn't say this mission was completed for you if you do this for me. He just tells us it is done. What does this lead us to do in return? It leads us to reflect this love to others. It leads us to tell them about how Jesus has made completed rescue impossible for everyone. Amen.