

Grounded

Hiding

Judges 6:11–24 (NRSV)

Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites. **12** The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, “The LORD is with you, you mighty warrior.” **13** Gideon answered him, “But sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the LORD has cast us off, and given us into the hand of Midian.” **14** Then the LORD turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; I hereby commission you.” **15** He responded, “But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.” **16** The LORD said to him, “But I will be with you, and you shall strike down the Midianites, every one of them.” **17** Then he said to him, “If now I have found favor with you, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. **18** Do not depart from here until I come to you, and bring out my present, and set it before you.” And he said, “I will stay until you return.” **19** So Gideon went into his house and prepared a kid, and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour; the meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the oak and presented them. **20** The angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour out the broth.” And he did so. **21** Then the angel of the LORD reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes; and the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. **22** Then Gideon perceived that it was the angel of the LORD; and Gideon said, “Help me, Lord GOD! For I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face.” **23** But the LORD said to him, “Peace be to you; do not fear, you shall not die.” **24** Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD, and called it, The LORD is peace.

Introduction. When I was a child we played a game, we called “**Hoopi Hide.**” You know the game as “Hide and Seek.” I loved when we played Hoopi Hide at my paternal grandparents’ house because it was an older, large two story home with lots of closets, nooks and crannies. It was great when some of my first cousins were in town and we could play together. I can still hear the words, “Ready or not, here I come.”

The words you heard from our scripture lesson are part of a story about “**hiding**” – a **people hiding for survival, what was hiding them and what was hiding in the one who would become their leader.** I sense we can learn much about ourselves, particularly what may be hiding within us by exploring this story. But even greater this story may give us the clue of how the hidden may be transformed into something greater and worthwhile.

The Setting.

The stories in the book of Judges have this story line. As the Israelites live in the land of Canaan, they forget about God and grow unfaithful. The shield of protection God set around them is lowered allowing enemies to attack and oppress them. They eventually cry out to God for help and God sends a deliver who enables them to throw off their oppressors. Eventually the pattern repeats itself.

The Gideon story begins with the reality that the people had not been faithful and nomadic tribes from the east began sweeping into the land to oppress them by destroying their crops and stealing their livestock. There were so many of these marauding easterners, the Israelites felt helpless to defend themselves. This was the reality for the Hebrews for a **7-year period of time.**

As a result, **the Israelites had adopted hiding out in the mountains and caves** to avoid detection by the Midianites. Needless to say their lifestyles were altered greatly. Their economy had tanked. They no longer could enjoy normal social interactions. There was great uncertainty about what their future held.

Given the season we are living in, most of us can make connection with the plight of the Israelites during the time of Gideon. We know about sheltering at home, limited opportunities for social interaction and impact on economies because of an adversary. I am sure all of us are praying that this Covid-19 season will not last for 7 years, right?

Gideon had adapted to the threat of the oppressors and found he had to go on living and providing for his family. So when it was time to reap the wheat crop, he felt it necessary to harvest the grain in the safest manner possible. So, he threshed the wheat in a wine press to “hide” from the Midianites.

Threshing wheat was done in open spaces, typically on solid rock or hard packed ground. It was a messy job that consisted of two steps: knowing the grain from the stalks by hitting it with a stick and then gathering the grain and removing the husk or chaff by tossing it into the air and allowing the breeze to carry away the husk. Doing this in a deep wine press to remain hidden would not have been pleasant or efficient. Gideon felt this was the best way to do so given the threat.

The Hidden.

In late March or early April, I was listening to a webcast by an organization that assists churches and non-profits with staffing. During this particular session, I heard one of the presenters make a comment. **He said that during this Covid season, any problems that an organization has with staff will be made known and accentuated.** He went on to explain how times of uncertainty and change bring these matters to the surface.

Being part of family of pastors (two sons, a daughter-in-law and brother), we often have conversation about what is going on in our churches. In conversations with three of the four,

this season has seemed to intensify and reveal underlying (hidden) issues with staff and leadership teams. I have been part of some rather lengthy conversations about these matters.

I suspect that what is true about intensification of issues on church and organization teams is also true in other spheres of our lives. This season of Covid-19 has exacerbated many issues that for the most part were simmering under the surface. In marriages where there were hidden matters, these have grown worse. Parents and children who were facing simmering issues have gotten more intense. Partnerships have been strained. Personal matters for many of us have surfaced.

For Gideon, there were at least three issues hiding that was doing harm to his life and presented a real threat.

- **The Midianites were a stealthy group of people.** There were not invaders who would come in and occupy the land. They were nomads who drifted in for a season, set up camp, took what they wanted and then left only to return again. No one could fully predict when and where they would appear.
- **Hiding within Gideon's people was a huge spiritual problem.** If you continue to read the story, you will find that in the center of Gideon's hometown there was an altar to Baal, the Canaanite deity. His people had grown disloyal to God and had either abandoned their allegiance to Yahweh altogether or had mixed their religious practice with a little of the Jewish faith and a lot of Baal worship.
- **Hiding with Gideon was part of the dark side of who he was.** Gideon had become a fear-filled person who was living largely in hiding. He had a low sense of self-esteem believing he was a nobody because he was from a lowly tribe, clan and family. He struggled to live boldly in the face of uncertainties and seem to always need one more reassurance before moving forward. (I don't know about you, but I can relate to Gideon with some of these things.)

The season in which Gideon was living caused these hidden matters to be closer to the surface. I am convinced that for many of us this Covid-19 season will bring some uncomfortable matters and threat closer to the surface for us as well.

God sitting under the Oak Tree.

One of my spiritual exercises on Sunday mornings before I leave home to head the church is to read and pray a psalm. A couple of weeks ago, the Psalm was 139 which speaks of God knowing all about us and being present. The psalmist speaks of attempting to hide from God but comes to realize that is not possible: *If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night," 12 even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you* (11–12). The psalmist goes on to speak of when he was in his mother's womb: **Psalm 139:15–16 (NRSV) —My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. 16 Your eyes beheld my unformed substance** (15). **God sees all our hidden stuff.**

When God speaks to Gideon through the divine messenger, God reveals something else He sees hidden in Gideon. The *angel of the Lord said to him, "The Lord is with you, you mighty warrior."* **God called Gideon a mighty warrior.** God was not focused on his weak character flaws but saw in him potential as a military leader.

God often sees something very different in us than we see in ourselves. God often sees in us something very different that others see in us. God not only knows our potential but God understands how we can be agents to bring needed transformation around us. I wonder, what does God see hidden in you?

It is obvious that Gideon was not persuaded by this title. He remained focused on the plight of his people and God's lack of intervention. He remained in a place of low self-esteem in

affirming he was from a lowly clan and was lowly. But if you continue to read the story, you find that Gideon became the mighty warrior who led in tearing down idols and bringing deliverance. How did this happen? How can it happen that you and me, our families and our church can become what God sees hidden in us?

Presence and peace.

In God's call to Gideon, the Lord made it clear that He was and would be present with Gideon.

- *The LORD is with you, you mighty warrior.*
- *Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; I hereby commission you.*
- *But I will be with you, and you shall strike down the Midianites, every one of them.*

Gideon could only become who God saw him to be by God being with him. He was not a mighty warrior in his own strength and resources. God being with him made him mighty. The ongoing part of this is that maintaining that relationship with God was critical to Gideon's ongoing success and effectiveness.

None of us can be, become or remain who God sees us in our own strength and resources. God must be with us. God is the principal partner in the relationship. If we ever seek independence from him, our potential wanes and we fall.

In the midst of tapping into God's presence, Gideon made a discovery about God's nature. When he made an offering and the angel touched it and fire consumed it, he knew he had been in the Angel of God's presence. He immediately feared for his life – a reversion to his old nature). But then God spoke to him, "*Peace be to you.*" Gideon had a desperate need of peace in every area of his life (from the physical enemies, the spiritual enemy and his personal self-image) and he received it when he came to realize who God was. While he had some future battles to fight in each area, knowing God as peace gave him strength and peace to face the battles.

There in that place he built an altar in honor of God and named it, Yahweh Shalom – The Lord is Peace.

During this season we are in, many of us have seen things hiding us and our world come to light. These often hinder us from becoming what God sees hidden in us – all we can fully become in Him. This morning lean into the reality that God is and wants to be present with you. You can be present with the Savior. Allow yourself to experience the revelation of who God is. Lean into our God who is our Peace.

At the table we celebrate God's presence. We believe Jesus is present in the bread and cup. As we partake, Jesus becomes part of who we are.