

Has anyone ever made an observation about you that is the complete opposite of reality? For example, someone says to you, “Boy, you sure look tired,” when in fact, you had a good night’s sleep and had been feeling pretty rested. Or someone says, “You look really upset, is everything OK?” And you’re thinking, that’s just my face. Everything’s fine. But then you start to wonder, are they right? Is there something I should be upset about? It can be jarring when someone sees something that you don’t.

I bring this up because in today’s reading from Judges, The Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and called him “a mighty man of valor.” But Gideon did not feel very powerful at all. He was in hiding from the Midianites, who were oppressing the children of Israel, destroying their crops, killing or stealing their animals (Judges 6:1–10). As a result, many of the Israelites were forced to make dens and strongholds for themselves in the mountains and in caves. What little wheat Gideon was able to gather he was forced to thresh in secret, in a winepress. And on top of all that, his clan was weakest in Manasseh, and he himself was least in his father’s house.

So we can understand Gideon’s response to the Angel of the Lord’s greeting: “the LORD is with you.” Gideon said to Him, “Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us? . . . But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian.”

Can you relate to Gideon? Perhaps there have been moments in the darkening days of this Advent season when you’ve asked questions similar to his. If God is with us, if He really is Immanuel, why is the Church struggling or ignored? If God is with me, then why are things such a mess? Why do I feel alone? Why am I sick and suffering? Where is the power of God that we hear about in the Bible?

Like Gideon, we, too, may sometimes feel forsaken. And yet, we also know, deep down, that the messes we experience are sometimes of our own making. That’s how it was in Gideon’s day. The reason God allowed Israel to be overrun by the Midianites is because the Israelites had done evil in His sight. This happens repeatedly in the Book of Judges. The Israelites forsake the Lord to run after other gods they think will give them more of what they want. God’s anger is roused against His rebellious people, and He allows their enemies to overtake them. Then, in their distress, they cry out to the Lord for help. And the Lord raises up a judge, a deliverer, to rescue them from the power of their enemies. The land has rest, and everything goes well for a period of time. But then, the judge dies, the people become spiritually complacent and apathetic, and they forsake the Lord again, and the whole process starts all over.

This is a warning for us. When everything is going well, we, too, can be tempted to become complacent in our faith, forgetting the Lord and forsaking Him for the things of this world. It should not surprise us, then, if the Lord allows hardship to come upon us so that we might be brought to see what we have done. But this is also for our comfort; the Lord is doing this for our good. He is seeking to work repentance in our hearts so in faith, we might call upon His name

again and with greater fervency. He disciplines us like a child whom He loves. With the Law, He turns us away from our idols, and by the Gospel, He draws us back and restores us to Himself. Through Christ, our deliverer, we have rest once more.

Gideon is a kind of preview of Jesus. He was the one chosen by God to deliver Israel in that day and to bring them rest again. Even though he was weakest and least, he was the Lord's man for the job. This is a consistent theme even to the end of the Gideon narrative. Instead of defeating the Midianites with a massive army, the Lord insists that Gideon reduce his army down from thirty-two thousand to only three hundred men. This was so that the victory would not be won by human strength (so they could boast in themselves) but solely by the wisdom and strength of the Lord.

The power of God being hidden beneath powerlessness points us to a fulfillment in Jesus. Gideon is a living prophecy of the victory over sin and death and the devil, which the Lord brings to us at Christmas. It is the way of God that the last shall be first and the humble shall be exalted. Jesus embodies this. He is the mighty and eternal Son of God, yet He does not look the part. He was laid in a cattle trough for a crib. His birth took place almost secretly. He appeared to be nothing more than a poor peasant boy. He was born in Bethlehem, which Scripture says is little among the clans of Judah. When, as an infant, His life was threatened by Herod, He was hidden away in Egypt for a time.

Jesus, our mighty man of valor, appeared to be vulnerable and helpless—not only in His birth but also in His death. Nevertheless, He brought about the fulfillment of His own words, which He had spoken to Gideon, "I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites *as one man*." Gideon and his mere three hundred would defeat the countless Midianites as one man because the Lord was with them. The Lord Jesus defeats all of our enemies, quite literally, as one man. By His incarnation, He has taken our humanity into Himself, and by His death and resurrection, He has destroyed sin, death, and the devil once for all. "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

Jesus is an army of one, the only one who can deliver us from our enemies. The one man Jesus defeated our powerful enemies through weakness because He is the Lord in the flesh. Out of lowly Bethlehem came the One to be the ruler and deliverer of Israel. The Midianites, in their confusion, would end up turning on and killing one another in their camp. In the same way, Jesus turned death and Satan against themselves on the cross, delivering us forever from their power and the sin that oppresses us. The one man Jesus assumed the humanity of all people in His conception and birth. And so this one man's victory also counts for all people in His death and resurrection. The name Gideon means "one who breaks or cuts down." Jesus, our Gideon, has broken and cut down all false gods and the devil himself by the wood of the manger and the rugged cross.

The Angel of the Lord first appeared to Gideon when he was threshing out wheat for bread in a winepress, and He departed from sight after Gideon offered up bread and meat on the rock. This can point us to the Sacrament of the Altar, where the Lord fulfills His promise to be with us in the flesh—where His body and blood, offered up on the rock of Golgotha, are given to us under

bread and wine. Though Jesus has departed from our sight, He is still present with us as true man in our need so that we might also share with Him in His divine glory. And so we say with Mary in her Magnificat, “He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate.”

Finally, when the Angel of the Lord departed from Gideon, Gideon realized that he had been in the very presence of God. Gideon thought he would die for having seen the Angel of the Lord face-to-face. But Gideon is given a word of peace. So, also, we are given peace, an invitation to come into the Lord’s presence without fear, through faith in Christ Jesus. By His true humanity, we are saved from judgment and reconciled to God. The Son of God also comforts us by saying, “Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die.” For the Lord Jesus is both the Mighty God and the Prince of Peace.

Let us, then, during this Advent season, look to Jesus as our Gideon, whose might is hidden in lowliness. In repentance and faith, let us trust in the God who hides His power until the perfect moment—whose presence always means peace.