

GOD THE GOOD SHEPHERD

UNIT ONE: God's Heroes

Lesson 5: 'The Sword of the Lord and Gideon!'

CONTENT:

1. Though Gideon was weak and hesitant at first, the Spirit of God came upon him and led him to defeat the Midianites and free Israel from their attacks.
2. Gideon gathered all the fighting men among the Israelites and led them to the Midianite camp. But God spoke to him and told him to send away those who were afraid. Then he told him to pick only 300 men.
3. The Israelites hid torches in clay jars and carried trumpets. At the signal, they broke the jars and blew their trumpets and cried, 'The sword of the Lord and Gideon.' The Midianites were confused and ran about killing each other and then fled.
4. At the start of his ministry, Jesus went to the synagogue and read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.. to let the oppressed go free.." Then he went around by the power of the Spirit healing, helping, feeding, forgiving. [CCC 549-550, 695]
5. Like Jesus and Like Gideon we too have the Holy Spirit. We received Him at Baptism. We too must help people and free them from their troubles. We can do this by praying and going forward to help. [CCC 1266, 2447]



ASSIGNMENT: Read handout at home. Reflect on Jesus' words with your family. Do what you have drawn!

REFERENCES: Judges 6:33-35, 7:1-23. Luke 4:18.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Handouts; a strong rope (or twisted cloth) for the tug-of-war.

I. STARTER:

- We're going to start our class today with a quick tug-of-war competition.

[Select 2 students to lead and ask them to choose 2 more students each to join their team.]

[Tie a handkerchief in the middle of the rope and draw 2 lines on either side of the centre.]

[At the signal the teams pull, trying to get the handkerchief to cross their line.]

[After the first round, the teacher (or another strong student) quietly goes and joins the team that lost the previous time and helps them win. The other team will protest, but explain thus:]

- We played this game to help us understand something about the story of Gideon. I was being like God, who helped the weaker team to win. Don't feel bad, this was only a kind of story.
- *[Ask the leaders]* Why did you choose (name) and (name) for your team?
- We choose people if they are strong, but what did God do when he was looking for someone to fight the Midianites? Did he pick someone from the strongest tribe?
[He chose Gideon who was the youngest in his family. His family was the smallest in their tribe. And their tribe was the weakest among all the tribes of Israel.]

Later we will try to find out why God did this.

II. DEVELOPMENT:

Soon after the angel left Gideon, he got news that a huge army of 135,000 enemy soldiers had come into Israel and had camped in a certain valley.

God sent his Spirit on Gideon and he became bold. He blew a trumpet and called all the tribes together. He asked them to send their fighting men to join him.

32,000 people came forward to fight.

(But would 32 thousand be enough? Let's do some calculations. 135 thousand against 32 thousand... that means that one Israelite would have to fight more than four enemy soldiers.)

Though his army was much smaller than the enemy's, Gideon led them forward and they camped in a place near the Midianites. But when they reached there, Gideon heard God's voice again.

"Gideon, you have too many men. Go and tell those who are afraid to go back."

So Gideon told the soldiers, "Anyone who is feeling frightened, go home!" (Guess how many went back? 22 thousand men! So how many were left? Only 10 thousand!) What was God up to?

Gideon had hardly finished counting his soldiers, when God spoke again. "There are still too many soldiers! Take the men down to the water and I'll tell you which ones to choose."

Gideon was puzzled, but he obeyed. He took the men down to the water and watched them drinking. He heard God saying, "Pick only the ones who put their heads down and lap up the water like dogs, not the ones who lift up the water in their hands."

So Gideon stood next to the water and watched the soldiers. He kept calling out, "You come here! You go there! You here... you there!" till all the men had drunk water. But when he counted his men this time he found that there were only... (Guess?) 300 men! 300 against 135,000! Now one soldier would have to fight 450 enemy soldiers! Impossible?

But don't forget, God was on their side! (Remember the tug-of-war?)

Gideon sent all the other soldiers back, but he was a bit afraid now. God knew what he was feeling, so he told him, "Go down to the Midianite camp and listen to the guards talking."

So Gideon went very quietly down to the valley (it was night-time) and hid in the bushes near the guard's post. Two guards were talking to each other and this is what Gideon heard:

"You know, I had a funny dream last night. I saw a little loaf of bread rolling down a hill. It came and hit a big tent and the whole tent fell down. I think it means something, but I don't know what!"

The other man said, "I know what it means! The loaf of bread is Gideon, the leader of the Israelites, and the tent is us, Midianites. God is going to defeat us by the hand of Gideon."

When Gideon heard this he smiled in the darkness and thanked God. Then he quietly went back to his men. He divided them into 3 groups. Each soldier carried a trumpet, a clay jar and a fire-torch. Then he told them his plan.

Very early next morning, while it was still dark, the three groups of soldiers put their torches into their jars and crept down the hill towards the sleeping Midianites. Each group came from a different side. Suddenly, when Gideon gave the signal, they blew their trumpets, broke their jars and shouted, "THE SWORD OF GOD AND GIDEON!"

As the Midianites woke up they saw fire coming out from no-where and they heard shouting and trumpets from all sides. They were confused and frightened. They began to kill each other, thinking that the enemy was in the camp. Then they all began to run away as fast as their legs could go.

Gideon and his army chased them right out of their land. The Israelites were able to go back to their homes and towns and live in peace.

[Students could plan and enact the story.]

NEXT CLASS:

- Last time we heard the story of how Gideon attacked the Midianites. We said that when we choose, we choose strong people to be in our team. What kind of person did God choose? *[A weak person]*
- What kind of army did the Israelites have in the end? Was it big or small? *[Small]*
- Why do you think God kept saying, “There are too many!” *[He wanted everyone to realize that it was by his power that they would win, not by their own strength.]*

[Give out the handouts and fill in the blanks, recapitulating the story at the same time.]

- There was someone else like Gideon who was also full of the Holy Spirit and who came to help people who were being troubled. Do you know anyone like that?.. I’m talking about Jesus.

Jesus came to help us because he knew that we have a lot of troubles and difficulties. One day, he went into the synagogue. (Just as we go to church, Jews go to the synagogue to hear God’s Word.) The rabbi in charge asked Jesus to read from the Holy Book. Jesus stood up and read these words:

[Students could read from the handouts.]

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to announce freedom to prisoners,
let blind people see again,
and to let the oppressed go free.

Then Jesus looked around and said, “These words are about me!” Then he began to go around teaching people, healing those who were sick, sending out evil spirits who were troubling people and calling people back to God. He made many sad people happy and free again. He was like Gideon, but in a different way. He set them free from their sicknesses and from the devil, not from the Midianites.

III. REFLECTION & PRAYER:

- What made Gideon brave and strong? *[The Spirit of God.]*
- Who sent Jesus to set people free? (Read what Jesus said.) *[The Spirit of the Lord.]*
- Do you have the Spirit of God in you? *[Yes]* When did he come to you? *[When we were baptised.]*
- So you also can help those who are sad or troubled and make them free. You can’t do it by your own strength, but with God’s help. That’s why it’s a good idea to pray to the Holy Spirit and ask him to use you to help others.

[Ask the students for practical ways they can help others. List them on the blackboard. Then ask the students to pick any one that they are going to do. They draw themselves doing it. End with a prayer to the Holy Spirit.]

Holy Spirit, make me strong so that I can help others who are in trouble. Amen.

<p>Home assignment: Read handout at home. Reflect on Jesus’ words with your family. <u>Do</u> what you have drawn!</p>
