

Oregon City United Methodist Church
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February 22, 2015

Series: Before the Judge

Sermon: Ehud - Lefty v Hefty

Judges 3:12-30

But the People of Israel went back to doing evil in God's sight. So God made Eglon king of Moab a power against Israel because they did evil in God's sight. He recruited the Ammonites and Amalekites and went out and struck Israel. They took the City of Palms. The People of Israel were in servitude to Eglon fourteen years.

The People of Israel cried out to God and God raised up for them a savior, Ehud son of Gera, a Benjaminite. He was left-handed. The People of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon king of Moab. Ehud made himself a short two-edged sword and strapped it on his right thigh under his clothes. He presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Eglon was grossly fat. After Ehud finished presenting the tribute, he went a little way with the men who had carried it. But when he got as far as the stone images near Gilgal, he went back and said, "I have a private message for you, O King."

The king told his servants, "Leave." They all left.

Ehud approached him - the king was now quite alone in his cool rooftop room - and said, "I have a word of God for you." Eglon stood up from his throne. Ehud reached with his left hand and took his sword from his right thigh and plunged it into the king's big belly. Not only the blade but the hilt went in. The fat closed in over it so he couldn't pull it out. Ehud slipped out by way of the porch and shut and locked the doors of the rooftop room behind him. Then he was gone.

When the servants came, they saw with surprise that the doors to the rooftop room were locked. They said, "He's probably relieving himself in the restroom."

They waited. And then they worried - no one was coming out of those locked doors. Finally, they got a key and unlocked them. There was their master, fallen on the floor, dead!

While they were standing around wondering what to do, Ehud was long gone. He got past the stone images and escaped to Seirah. When he got there, he sounded the trumpet on Mount Ephraim. The People of Israel came down from the hills and joined him. He took his place at their head.

He said, "Follow me, for God has given your enemies - yes, Moab - to you." They went down after him and secured the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites. They let no one cross over.

At that time, they struck down about ten companies of Moabites, all of them well-fed and robust. Not one escaped. That day Moab was subdued under the hand of Israel.

The land was quiet for eighty years.

Sermon

I have a confession to make. Last week, Valentine's Week, I took my wife to see 50 Shades in the theater. Paid Tribute to the Gods of Valentine. The obligatory card, kids got flowers, things we do for what we call VD day, which this year included two tickets to "50 Shades of Shoot Me Now." Anybody else see the movie? No? It makes a record 93 million dollars and we're the only ones who've seen it? Long story short, this is not a movie that we will ever show at church. Beyond all of the intimate moments and steamy scenes, there is an underlying current of dominance and submissiveness sometimes found in relationships. Where one party has all of the power, and the other, none of the power. In the movie, there is even a contract about how one is supposed to give up all rights and say in the relationship. It's not a movie about love. It's a movie about force, and my right to do to you whatever I want to do to you, even if it means violence. Of course, I could just be a prude and not understand these types of arrangements. I really don't care what happens behind closed doors, but if people are being hurt, abused against their own will, that's not right, right? If she does right, she gets rewarded. If she breaks his rules, she gets punished. Doesn't sound like a loving relationship. Sounds like subjection.

It might sound like our Bible passage today. Where one party has all the power and the other party has to pay tribute. Tribute is money given from the weaker party to the stronger party to essentially pay off the stronger party to not attack. Think extortion. Think bully at school, give me your lunch money or I'll pummel you. Paying tribute. In the best sense, it could be protection money. We'll pay you tribute if you protect us from other nations. In the worst sense, it's we'll pay you money if you don't attack us.

Today, in this first Sunday of Lent, we begin a sermon series out about a few of the Judges that we find in the Book of _____. Now, I'll be honest. I thought these judges were actual Judges. Gavel, bench, the whole bit. But they were warriors. Leaders who came out of nowhere when a crisis evolved. Of course, back then, there were no branches of government. The ruler made the rules, enforced the rules, and was judge and jury on all things. Made it nice and simple.

So where are we in the Biblical time-line? We are way in the beginning stories of what would become the nation of Israel. Abraham was promised the promised land. His descendants end up in Egypt, where they become slaves to Pharaoh. Moses eventually leads them out and into the desert for 40 years. Joshua leads them into the promised land, and the land of Canaan gets divided up among the 12 tribes of Israel. We have 12 distinct tribes. With boundaries. They have a shared past, but they don't have a shared vision for the future. Think back to the 13 colonies of America. Before the Revolutionary War, they were quite happy to go their own way. South Carolina didn't care much about what happened to Massachusetts, Virginia couldn't care less about Georgia. Same motherland, but not unified and had no plans to be. Same with the tribes in Judges. Judah didn't care about Gad, Issachar never went along with Asher. It wouldn't be until a few centuries that they would be unified under one banner. The first King Saul, then David, then Solomon. But for now, it's every tribe for themselves. Which is fine, until a regional crisis emerges that require them to get along.

In this period of biblical history, we have between 13-15 judges who lead Israel when such a national crisis emerges. And in Judges, the same pattern always emerges. First, the tribes do evil in the sight of the Lord, Second, they get oppressed by an outside foe, third, they call for help, and fourth, they find deliverance thru a "Judge." There would be a time of peace and prosperity, and then once again, the tribes do evil in the sight of the Lord, they get oppressed, they call for help, and find deliverance thru a Judge and peace would return. Later on, they do evil . . . 15 times in the book! The first Judge was Othniel. They became subjects of the King of Aram - a neighboring kingdom. After eight years of oppression, the Israelites call out, Othniel goes to war, defeats the King, becomes a Judge, or leader, and they have peace for 40 years. That's when we get to Ehud. For Lent, we will look at major Judges of the time, beginning with the second judge, Ehud. Most of us would say, E-who? Ehud.

Again, the tribes do evil in the sight of the Lord, go figure, and this time it's Eglon King of Moab who wraps them into his kingdom. Now, what kind of Evil are they doing? For starters, they forgot about God and the Torah, the law. They begin to practice the religion of the Caananites, Baal worship, and pagan rituals. God gets upset and lets them get captured. For 18 years, they have to pay tribute to Moab, or get demolished. They cry out, and Ehud comes into the Story. I like to call this, "Lefty vs. Hefty". Ehud comes from the tribe of Benjamin. In Hebrew, Benjamin means, "Son of my right hand." So this Lefty comes from a right hand tribe. Did you know, and I did not before this week, that the Jewish culture has a thing about lefties? Many cultures did. It isn't right, it's not natural - so the thinking went. You shake with your right hand. You salute with your right hand. You fight with your right hand. Your left hand did other things - think with me now, this is the days before toilet paper. You don't want to know how long I researched this - making sure I was saying something true. In many cultures without toilet paper today, you wipe with your south paw. Blah. I like living in this country. Many times, parents would pray that their children would grow up right handed. I think we're beyond that now. But it was noted in scripture that he was a lefty - giving us readers a hint about how God can use the least likely, even a left-handed person, to do his work.

You have the story before you today, I won't go into all of it. But Ehud is tired of paying tribute. You get to a point where you're sick and tired of being sick and tired. I've had it. Enough! And Ehud puts matters into his own hands, and thigh. They pay the tribute, and leave. But Ehud comes back with a secret message. Eglon invites him to a private place. Eglon gets up from his throne. Some commentaries, not all, but some, have said that this meeting is actually in a very private room - the privy. The bathroom. And Eglon gets up from the throne - don't ask. Ehud gets him the gut with his 18 inch dagger, locks the door and escapes out the back way. The back way where they dump the stuff from the throne room - His escape is very Shawshank. He makes it back to his nation, rallies the tribes against Moab, and they earn their victory and independence. No more subjection. No more being submissive. No more paying tribute, hoping not to get hurt. Ehud is Judge for Israel, and the land has peace for 80 years.

Ehud was tired of paying Tribute. Now, God didn't say "Go assassinate Eglon." God is strangely silent on this. But the end result was that the tribes were free once again.

What I want to share in my time this morning is to ask you if you are paying tribute in your relationships. Tribute is what you pay to keep the status quo, so you don't get hurt. Tribute might work in international diplomacy, or not, as Eglon found out, but it certainly doesn't work in relationships.

Domestic violence is an enormous problem in our community. The last few shootings in Oregon City have been between husband and wife. The statistics prove it is of epidemic proportions.

Every 10 seconds a woman is beaten in the United States.

1 in 3 or 4 women (30%) is battered once in her life time. Imagine 1 out of every 3 or 4 women has been beaten.

The number of American troops killed in Afghanistan and Iraq between 2001 and 2012 was 6,488 . The number of American women who were murdered by current or ex male partners during that time was 11,766. That's nearly double the amount of casualties lost during war.

These statistics would indicate that there are women among us today in this assembly who have been or still are victims of domestic violence. Some might even be thinking, "Pastor Mike, keep your mouth shut right now, you're just going to make him mad." How sad. How sad. Our hearts goes out to you. We hope you will find freedom from the violence, and if you are already liberated, may you find healing for you wounds. Please know

that this is a safe place. This is a safe place to ask for seek, to seek guidance and support. Even if you don't feel comfortable coming to a male pastor, we have a wonderful women's ministry that can help. We have Stephen's Ministers who can listen. The days that a woman should submit to their husbands are over. Even the Catholic Church, with it's high emphasis on sticking it out thru a marriage says that God would not want someone to stay in an abusive relationship. Are you tired of paying tribute? Where one person has all the say and one has no voice? Even if there isn't abuse going on, do you feel like your voice matters? I do a lot of weddings, and even some of our wedding traditions shows the inequality inherent in society. In the olden days, when the dad walks down the bride to the groom, the minister usually says something like, "Who brings _____" We don't do that in the Methodist church anymore. We also don't use the word OBEY in our vows. What each person promises to the other are the same. I did my brother's wedding a few years back, and we're walking down the aisle, me and him, and he leans over, "\$10 if you throw in the word OBEY." I said "OK." He said, "That was too easy." I said, "What she promises to you will be the same that you promise to her. She promises to obey you, you promise to obey her." He responded, "That doesn't make any sense." No it doesn't. And we dropped it. I was out \$10 easy bucks.

Of course, what's the answer? Ehud solved his little problem with assassinating the king. So, to carry on the metaphor, should anyone being controlled go off and knock off their abuser? Of course not. There are places to get help. There are people, counselors, who can give you the tools to strengthen your relationships, instead of feeling like your strangled in your relationships. Romans 13:10 says, "Love does no harm." Love does no harm. It doesn't say, Love does just a little bit of harm. Or Love does no harm unless they deserve it. Love does no harm. Period.

Ehud, tired of paying tribute. Tired of having no voice, no vote in their international relationship. It was time to do something about it. Once they found their voice, once they did something about it, there was peace in the land for 80 years. Are you tired of paying tribute? Tired of not having your vote matter? Do you want peace? It's time to find your voice.

And the people of God said, AMEN.