

September 2, 2018

A Sermon Preached by  
The Reverend Dr. W. Douglas Hood, Jr.

## “Useful Enemies”

Exodus 17:8-16

**Wee Kirk Presbyterian Church**

*The little church with a big heart  
in Linville, North Carolina*

### **Listen for God’s Word:**

*“The Lord is at war with Amalek  
in every generation”*

Exodus 17:16b (Common English Bible)

On May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1940 a black limousine stopped in front of Buckingham Palace in London. A man emerged from the limo that was short of stature but tall in character. As he walked up the steps to Buckingham Palace, the world was in chaos. Neville Chamberlain had resigned as Prime Minister of Great Britain. Adolf Hitler and the Nazis were in power in Germany. Stalin was in power in Russia. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was President of the United States. As he emerged from the limousine, Sir Winston Churchill knew that King George the Sixth was going to ask him to be the Prime Minister of a new coalition government. As Churchill paused on the steps to reflect on the moment he realized that every book he had ever read, every essay he had ever written and every leadership principal he had ever learned had prepared him for this decisive hour. At 6 p.m. that day, Sir Winston Churchill became Prime Minister of Great Britain.

Sir Winston Churchill was prepared to lead a great nation in wartime because he looked at every opportunity, every challenge and every disappointment as opportunities to grow – to become more. Churchill made every experience of life useful.

In our lesson from Exodus this morning, the people of Israel are on a journey. They have left Egypt where they lived as slaves. They are on their way to a promised land where they would establish a nation as a free people. But now they are in-between: In-between a time they were slaves and the time they would be a nation. God alone brought them out of Egypt by bringing ten disasters upon Egypt. The tenth was enough for Pharaoh to be convinced to let the people leave Egypt. God did this, through his servant Moses; the people didn’t. Then the people were caught in the wilderness between Pharaoh’s armies and the Red Sea. Pharaoh had changed his mind about letting the people go free. Israel was stuck. God took care of this unfortunate circumstance as well. Again, through Moses, God opened the Red Sea and the people simply walked across. When Pharaoh’s armies followed, God closed the waters of the Red Sea over them and they were all drowned.

Here is Israel, who for over 400 years had been slaves. They knew little about caring for themselves. They knew nothing about being a nation. Leadership skills are not taught to slaves. Just as God brought Israel out of slavery, God now took care of the Red Sea for them. Israel are a children of God. God is their heavenly Father. Let me ask the parents here this morning – whether your children are still

young or they are adults – is it wise to do everything for your children?

**What is clear is that the challenges, and difficulties, and failures of life are the best teachers of life.**

Naturally, the wise parent steps back a little in the beginning and a little more as a child matures, and permits their child to face challenges, and difficulties, and failures as preparation for becoming adults. What is clear is that the challenges, and difficulties, and failures of life are the best teachers in life. They become useful to our children as they become fully mature, capable adults. No loving parent artificially creates challenges, difficulties, or failures for their children. Life provides each in abundance. But, as parents, we do permit each challenge, difficulty, and failure to be useful to our children – useful for preparing them for adulthood.

In our lesson this morning Israel has arrived at Rephidim, a place near the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula. There they are attacked by an enemy. The leader of the enemy is Amalek and his army is known simply as the Amalekites. Amalek is like a modern day gang leader. He preys on the people traveling through the desert. When the attack began, Moses told Joshua to choose some men and go and fight. An Israel army was put together on the fly. Then Moses went to the top of a nearby hill. There, Moses held-up the staff of God. When Moses held the staff high the quickly assembled Israel army prevailed against Amalek and his gang. When Moses' arms grew tired, and began to drop from exhaustion, Amalek and his men prevailed. Certainly, the battle is not

being decided by Joshua and the army of Israel. So you have to wonder? What value is there in Joshua and the army of Israel? The point of the battle isn't to get rid of the enemy. The point of the battle is to teach the people not to be afraid of their enemies.

**You will have to face your Amalek just as Israel had to face Amalek.**

There are always going to be enemies. At the end of chapter 17, we are told Amalek will persevere from one generation to the next. He just keeps showing-up. Only with different names and faces. Who is your Amalek? Who is the enemy that tempts you to be afraid – so afraid that you begin to think you will never make it to the Promised Land? Perhaps it is someone who has told you that you are not good enough. Perhaps it is an addiction that wrestles with you every single day to destroy you. Perhaps guilt from the past. Or maybe it is an actual terrorist that make you afraid to travel. You can pray for God to make Amalek to go away. But the way I read this story, that is not going to happen. You will have to face your Amalek just as Israel had to face Amalek. But Israel faced Amalek with Moses' arms lifted to heaven. Israel faced Amalek with God.

**It is by facing the enemy that we are changed.**

God doesn't make Amalek go away. Nor does God make us face Amalek all alone. It is a battle we do with God. And it is by facing the enemy that we are changed. We are prepared as Sir Winston Churchill was prepared, for even greater

battles. But, also, we are prepared for receiving the Promise Land that God has uniquely chosen for each of us.

**But Sir Winston Churchill  
summoned something great,  
something noble from deep  
within the people and called  
them to face the enemy.  
The result was that they  
developed a great strength,  
a great resolve,  
and a great faith.**

The first semester of my senior year in college I studied in Coventry, England. During the Second World War, the cathedral was targeted by Nazi Germany and destroyed by incendiary bombs. What would burn, burned. What would melt did so. The stone walls stood and remain today. The senior pastor of the cathedral shared with me that when the British were attacked by Germany, fear nearly consumed the people. But Sir Winston Churchill summoned something great, something noble from deep within the people and called them to face the enemy. The result was that they developed a great strength, a great resolve, and a great faith. The British resolved to never surrender and to remain constantly in prayer, dependent upon God to defeat the enemy. The pastor shared that as a result of that war, the British became a better people. They made the enemy useful and became something so much more than they had been.

Israel had to face Amalek in the wilderness. They had not fought a battle in hundreds of years. Their immediate history was one of slavery in Egypt. And

slaves don't fight battles. Yet, Moses summoned something great, something noble from deep within the people and called them to face the enemy. God made Amalek useful to Israel, to prepare them for the responsibility of building a nation. When you face your Amalek, make him useful. And know, that God fights with you.

Amen.

**First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach**  
**33 Gleason Street • Delray Beach, Florida 33483**  
**(561) 276-6338 • [administrator@firstdelray.com](mailto:administrator@firstdelray.com) • [www.firstdelray.com](http://www.firstdelray.com)**