**Week 1 - Courage for the Journey**

**Bible Reading: Judges 6**

***Testimony subject – How did God step into your life and strengthen you?***

**Introduction/Context**

* When life feels hopeless and overwhelming, God equips us with courage through his presence, his promises and his unfailing love.
* God empowers us to face our challenges with faith and perseverance. When Gideon, Jeremiah and Elijah called out in despair during dark and miserable moments, God stepped in and spoke to them.
* In our journey to the cross this Lenten season, we look at how God gives us courage for the journey that we are called to live out. This series will look at biblical examples of courage in the face of hopelessness, opposition and despair, and how we can all become courageous disciples of Christ, having been strengthened and emboldened to step out in faith and face our calling.

**A hopeless position**

* The book of Judges describes the years from the death of Joshua to the time of Samuel. During this time Israel was ruled by a series of heroes, 13 ‘judges’, who were raised up for the needs of the time. Sadly, the children of Israel followed the same pattern again and again – defecting from following God, then being led back to him, only to stray again.
* The Israelites were hungry and overwhelmed and had resorted to living in caves in the mountains. The invading nomadic tribes had camels – a new weapon the Israelites had not seen before.
* Gideon was trying to thresh wheat in a winepress – a difficult place to do that task, though it was hidden from the Midianites.
* The Israelites had forsaken God and were worshipping at Baal altars (Judges 6:28) – they had been taken in by the ways of the world around them.
* Do you see any resemblance to the world we live in? The membership in churches is decreasing in many places – there are many other things people can do on Sunday rather than go to church. The answers to people’s needs seem to be met in many other places. Christian voices are hardly listened to. The work that the Church is doing to help the poor and marginalised is rarely mentioned.

**Remember what God has done in the past**

* Repeatedly the Israelites are asked to remember how God provided for them in the past (Judges 6:7-9).
* All too easily we forget how God has answered our prayers, given us what we needed at just the right time, and seen us through difficulties.
* Luke 1:37 says, ‘For no word from God will ever fail.’
* We can look back to so many others in the Bible who called out to God from a hopeless position, but God answered their faithfulness and gave them the courage that they needed for their journeys.
* Elijah (1 Kings 19)

Elijah faced deep hopelessness after his victory on Mount Carmel, fleeing into the wilderness and asking God to take his life as he felt overwhelmed and alone. In Elijah’s despair, God provided for his physical needs and spoke to him gently – not in a dramatic display, but in a still, small voice (‘a gentle whisper’). Through this, Elijah was reminded of God’s presence and purpose, and found the strength to continue his mission.

* Jeremiah (Jeremiah 32:26-27)

Despite his lamentations and feelings of despair, Jeremiah remained faithful, pouring out his heart to God and trusting him in the midst of suffering. Through Jeremiah’s perseverance, God revealed his enduring plans for restoration and hope, reminding us that faith can sustain us even in the darkest times.

**God chooses and equips the faithful**

* The world has an interesting idea of who the ‘great’ ones are – athletic, rich, attractive, successful. But God’s criteria are those faithfully living their lives for him, listening to him, following his word, seeking to know his will for each day.
* Gideon was led to sift out the people God was not going to use (Judges 7:4-6), and then bravely make a stand (Judges 6:25-26).
* Those who are chosen must renounce anything in their lives that is not pure and acceptable to God.The promise that God gives to his people numerous times is that he is with them and is sending them in his strength, not their own.
* God gives us the tools we need for the tasks he calls us to.

**Application and response**

* Courageous disciples don’t think that they can do anything in their own strength.
* However, with God’s strength and guidance, they are willing to stand against what is evil. Having seen all that God has done, we can be confident that he can ‘do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us’ (Ephesians 3:20).
* In what way should we be stepping out in the strength that we have, depending on God to do what we cannot do?