

To KILL A KING

18th June 2017

Readings: Judges 3:12-30

Read Judges 3:12-20 as introduction

In the book of Judges Ehud's a real challenge to preach. I know where I'm going with the rest but this character's difficult. Its not that he's uninteresting - not in the least. He's brave and cunning and gets one over the king. The problem lies his relevance for us today and also how does his story point to Christ. Twice in Luke 24 Jesus tells his disciples – on the road to Emmaus and in the upper room – that every Old Testament

passage points to him. If so how does Ehud point to Christ? So after much pondering and prayer we're going to do three things: we'll briefly look at colourful character from New Zealand history who was also cunning, brave and got one over a king. Then we'll look at Ehud who was also cunning, brave and got one over a king and finally we'll look at Jesus who was cunning and brave ... and there's a twist.

Let's pray

Ehud's cunning, brave and got one over the king. And which New Zealander is similar? Whom am I thinking of?... Hone Hika. Hika was a Maori chief from up north prominent in the early 1800's. After initial contact with Europeans he wanted nothing more than to arm his men with muskets. However with strict controls on selling muskets to Maori - certainly in the numbers he wanted - his plans were frustrated. However in 1819 he traveled to England where he met and impressed King George. Now was his chance to acquire muskets. But no, he was again denied. However the King did give him a number of gifts including a suit of amour. Stopping off at Sydney on the way home Hone promptly sold the gifts and purchased guns. So started the musket wars which had such a devastating impact on NZ Maori. Dominating tribal warfare he even made a raid on Rotorua Maori. Now when attacked the Maori of Rotoura would retreat to Mokoia Island. Their warriors would then wade back out from the island and in the shallow water that stretches a long way out, upset the advancing waka and deal to attackers hand to hand. However muskets changed everything and massacre by Hika's men was devastating and is still resented to this day. In a stroke of irony the Rotorua Maori had one musket. Aimed at Hone and discharge accurately, it struck Hone on the head. However, the European style military helmet he wore saved his life.



And so Hika's story is one of cunning and bravery and deceiving a king. And so he reminds me Ehud. His story begins in Judges 3:12.

Once again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord... Judge 3:12

The introduction to Ehud's story is grim and common to how most of the Judges get their start. For after the death of the each Judge God's people turn away from him. So God gives them over to the nation of Moab so in their distress they might turn back to God. Now Israel and Moab are separated by the river Jordan. King Eglon's army captures the fords, cross the river and sets up a garrison in Israel. From here he extracts a heavy tribute, getting rich at Israel's expense. Now, after eighteen years God's people finally cry out to God for help. So God sends a judge to the rescue and his name was Ehud. Ehud the Judge, though Ehud the Assassin is a better name, for this is his plan - to assassinate the king. With a combination of cunning and bravery he will deceive and kill king Eglon. However, in his way were three obstacles. How to get to the king without causing suspicion. How to get the king alone. And how to escape.

Before we see how this plays out, who is Ehud? Well, the first thing we're told in verse 15 is he's left-handed and from the tribe of Benjamin. Now there's a play on words here as the name Benjamin means "son of my right hand" yet Ehud is left handed. Now in those days being left-handed was considered a social impediment - as it was for us until the last 50 years or so. My father's a southpaw and he was forced to write with his right hand at school which he promptly reversed when he left. In fact the word "sinister" comes from the Latin word for left-handed. One preacher had parents who were both left-handed and they loved this story because finally there was a left handed hero in the Bible. She didn't have the heart to tell them the negative connotations being left handed had in this story. Why is the left-handedness important? - it becomes the means by which Ehud deceives the king. For...

Now Ehud had made a double-edged sword about a foot and a half long, which he strapped to his right thigh under his clothing. Judge 3:16

What's his logic? Well by default we expect everyone to be right-handed. So if there is a weapon we look to the right hand. This is the origin of shaking hands. Greeting someone with an empty, outstretched right hand shows the other person we have no weapon and we came in peace. This is confirmed by the other person extended their empty right hand. However this gives lefties an advantage with a concealed weapon ready to be used by the left. So, strapping a short sword to his right thigh is a perfect concealment, as when he's searched it's unlikely to be found.

Ehud has a plan but how was he to get close enough to use it? Judges 3:15b...

The Israelites sent him with tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Judge 3:15b

Ehud solves his first major problem by leading the delegation delivering tribute to the king. Ehud arrives at the royal place and is probably searched but nothing's found. And we're now introduced to the king, whom we are told is a very fat man. Again there's a play on words. In a similar way that Ehud's being a Benjamin emphasizes and plays on his left-handedness so it is with Elgon's name. Eglon means "little bull" or "calf". So, highlighting the king's fatness indicates he's a "fattened calf". How did he get fat? On the food and wealth extracted from the Israelites. Why is this play on words significant? Well, we all know what happens to the "fattened calf" and it's not good.

Now that Ehud's close enough to strike how does he get the king alone, away from his guards and attendants? Well, he does something unexpected for a would-be assassin. Instead of striking then in there Ehud and the Israelites leave in peace. However, at the boarder Ehud turns back seeking special audience with the king.

"I have a secret message for you, O king." Judges 3:19

Intrigued and put at ease by the generous tribute already delivered the king wants to know more. Why wouldn't the God of Israel have a special word for him. After all, he's the king, master of all he surveys. His gods are far superior to the strange God of the Israelites. Maybe this God also wants to pay tribute to his great majesty. So in his pride...

The king said, "Quiet!" And all his attendants left him. Judges 3:19

Be warned, what's about to happen is not for the squeamish or faint hearted. Alone in an upper room of kings splendid palace Ehud is invited in.

"I have a message from God for you." As the king rose from his seat, Ehud reached with his left hand, drew the sword from his right thigh and plunged it into the king's belly. Even the handle sank in after the blade, which came out his back. Ehud did not pull the sword out, and the fat closed in over it Judges 3:20–22

Gross isn't it. No surprises why you won't find this in a children's Bible nor is this a common memory verse!

Still, the deed is done. He who has oppressed God's people for eighteen years is dead but Ehud's not safe yet and God's people are long way from being rescued. So, how does Ehud escape?

Then Ehud went out to the porch; he shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them. Judges 3:23

After a time the attendants become concerned. They assume he's on the toilet and not to be disturbed.

They waited to the point of embarrassment, but when he did not open the doors of the room, they took a key and unlocked them. There they saw their lord fallen to the floor, dead. Judges 3:25

Events now move quickly. Ehud escapes across the boarder. Trumpets are blown. The Israelites are called to arms. The river ford is captured. The garrison at Jericho isolated. Ten thousand Moabite soldiers are killed and the tables are reversed. Now Moab pays tribute to Israel. And Ehud's story finishes with these words finishes...

That day Moab was made subject to Israel, and the land had peace for eighty years. Judge 3:30

And so what are we to make of this story? What, if any, are the implications for us? Well, I want to focus Ehud's left-handedness. The narrator focuses our attention on this as the means by which he could deceive and assassinate the king. But there's more. For Bible scholars point out the Hebrew term used here can also mean deformed. It may mean Ehud used his left hand as his right was deformed. If so, it makes his victory all the more dramatic.

But there's principle here for us: God uses us despite our flaws. Left handedness was consider a flaw, more so a deformed hand, yet God chose Ehud and brought a great victory. Now thankfully left-handedness is not considered a flaw now but there are other flaws our culture disdains and puts us to one side. Mental health springs to mind, as does poverty or no education. These become everyday barriers when it comes to opportunities and careers and the like. Not so with God. He takes people society considers flawed and uses them for his glory. And this is emphasised by the fact that Ehud probably had a deformed hand. No physical handicap is a limitation to God.

Many know the story of Joni Eareckson Tada who at age 18, misjudged the shallowness when diving into water and broke here neck. During her two years of rehabilitation she experienced anger, depression, suicidal thoughts, and doubts of God. Yet in her best selling book titled *Joni: The unforgettable story of a young woman's struggle against quadriplegia & depression* she describes how God carried her through and how her effective her ministry was becoming despite her disability. No physical handicap is a limitation to God.

Closer to home there's the story of Andrew Johnstone. As a young lad he gave his life to the Lord and grew a strong faith. Enlisting during World War I he found himself on active duty. However, on his first day at the front, in the second battle of the Somme, he was blinded by enemy fire. Like Joni he battled depression and where was God in all this. But God had plans for Andrew who, upon return, became a travelling evangelist. Becoming known as the Blind Evangelist, Andrew was a well sort after speaker throughout New Zealand between the world wars, with many coming to Christ. So, be encouraged, no matter our flaw, whether like Ehud, or Andrew Johnston, God can use us.

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11

And Ehud's story is not only an encouragement to us who have flaws, whether physical or otherwise, but his story points to Christ. In particular the intrigue of the royal court and the assignation of a king. For God would send a king - not like King George of England or king Eglon of Moab but the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And from birth he was in the sights of an assassin. Satan knew if he could kill this King, then his Kingdom would be his. So by deceit he plotted to take the life of the King of Kings. And betrayal and a cross the King was killed. And Satan the assassin danced on this King's grave. However, unlike King Eglon, this King was not deceived. Instead, he turned the tables on his assassin. How? Well, he rose from the dead, defeated sin and death and vanquished Satan and his hordes. Yes, Jesus, King of Kings, and Lord of Lord's was not duped, the assassin did not have his way and a great victory was won. And because of this we who least deserve it, who are flawed in so many ways, have been rescued. Not only that, adopted as dear children into the Father heart of God. No wonder we worship Jesus. Now wonder we bow our knee and delight in his beauty. What an awesome God we serve

And so, what've we learned this morning. Well we've seen Ehud was brave and cunning and fooled a king, despite his physical flaw, Whether it was merely the social distain for being a leftie or a deformed hand, we're not sure. But we are reminded no flaw - physical, social, mental or emotional - is a barrier to God. Each one of us - despite our limitations, despite our brokenness - can and will be used by God. For God's plan to rescue his people cannot be derailed. They weren't derailed by the assassin Satan who tried and failed to take-out the King of Kings and they aren't derailed by our limitations and we look to Jesus - risen Lord, King of Kings - mighty to save. Our Saviour and great friend. Amen.