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Sermon Transcript: For The Win

He like memorized most of that. Did you notice that? That was—not often do liturgists ask me like two weeks ahead of time, "What am I going to be reading?" I thought, "Well, okay, here you go, Tony." And like, that's what you were doing with the time. Good on you. Yeah. I would—yeah, that's tough.

I do want to let you know that I don't want to brag or anything, but I have some pretty famous things about myself as well. I don't want to brag too much, but in the 70s and 80s, I was part of what was considered one of the greatest soccer teams to ever play Belleville soccer: the Orange Crush. You might have heard of them. I was on that team. And you know, this is back in the days before we had like travel teams, you know, where like now kids are competing against kids in like Montana, you know, but boy, back in the good old days, once you won the Mesa tournament here in the Belleville area, that was the top of the heap. You were the kings and queens of the world if you won that. And we did almost every year, so we're pretty full of ourselves.

And I would love to tell you that the reason why the Orange Crush crushed it year after year after year was because of the amazing footwork and moves of Pastor Rob as a kid playing soccer. But if I did that, I'd be a liar. I often played fullback, which meant, "Hey, Rob, get all the way in the back." I know that that's a real position and it has value on soccer teams, but I'm just telling you on the Orange Crush it was, "Rob, just go back there." And so I did. And I got a little better over the years, but not that much better.

I had kind of this patent move I would do through most of the game. I didn't have a name for it, but it was called the "bunny hop move." Not because I named it, but because Jimmy Plasmire would make fun of me and call it that. And it went something like this: This is me during most of the games. I just would do this the whole time. And I just was excited, and the ball's not anywhere near me. It's way out there. And I'm just like, "Oh, maybe it'll come." And then as it would come to me, like, I'd just be like, "And then it would—now I got to try to kick it," you know? And flailing would happen.

The Penalty Kick and the 8mm Reel

But one time—one time we got a penalty kick. And the coach said, "Rob, you do the penalty kick." And like this is like—I know maybe you're not all soccer fans or you don't know about the great history of the Orange Crush, but this was a game where like basically they put the

ball down and it's just you and the goalie. And I don't know what it did to that goalie psychologically, but when I went up to the ball, I did this. I was so excited to be kicking this, but in my head I'm thinking, "What are they thinking? They need to have Tad kick this." You many of you know Anne Smith in our congregation. Her son Tad, well, he's the reason why the Orange Crush won all the games. Our main—this is what you did when you were on the Orange Crush: "Where's Tad? Over there. Get it to him." And then Tad would go score a goal. We also had Bernie Uxa—he's actually a lawyer in town now—so, but it was like between Bernie and Tad and then like Bernie's little brother was so good, Tommy, that even though he was a little kid, we put him on our team. And I partly because he was so good, also I think his parents maybe were just like, "We're not going to two different places. We're all going to be on the same team." And so anyway, but basically you got the Uxa kids and Tad Smith and they scored most of the goals and the rest of us just did stuff like this the whole game.

But anyway, so I'm going up for the penalty kick and I'm so excited. And I know what happened in this moment because it was recorded on film. Because this is back in the day when you couldn't just whip out your phone and record something, and if your kid messed up you go, "Delete." Like, I mean, it was like it wasn't even like VHS tapes you could record over. This was 8mm, folks. And for whatever reason, my dad brought the 8-millimeter reel to one of my games. Not in any way anticipating the greatness that was going to exude from here, right? But it happened to be at that same game that he had it. And I know what happened. I know that Joyce Dyer said, "Jerome, get the camera out! Rob's got to kick the—" I mean, probably told him to get it out because you're not going to film the whole thing because it's precious film. I mean, once you record on it, it's done, right? So you didn't get to see this in the recording. That part got skipped.

Right before I kick it, the reel starts going and so you see me going up. And I remember—I remember thinking, because I've relived this from watching this moment of glory—is that I remember thinking, "Man, the way Tad does this, he's able to kick it and launch it up into one of the upper corners of the goal. It's very cool, right?" And so I thought, "That's what I'm going to do. That's what I'm going to do." And I went up to it and at the last minute—I think you're supposed to kick like on the laces when you kick the soccer ball, or maybe on the side of your foot, but I decided to go with front big toe. Which I don't know if you know this, but like your shoe is shaped like this and a soccer ball is round. Are you all familiar with this? Yeah. Who wouldn't? Who knew?

Anyway, but when one sharp point hits a round ball, if you don't hit it just perfect, it goes—I know, because that was often my signature move. So I just went up and at the last minute I just—just a straight kick, and that ball did not exactly fly up to the top corner of the goal. In

fact, I would say it looked like some type of great increase in the gravity of the planet Earth, because it never left the ground. It's like it dragged across the ground. Like, it didn't float, it's just like a—I mean, it just dragged, and out of some miracle of Jesus and the angels, it got past the goalie and it went in. Right. You could applaud if you want. That was pretty good. That was the best it got in my soccer career right there, that moment. But there is no way that I thought I was the right person for this job, and I probably wasn't. But you never know when it's going to work out, and you have to just give it a try.

Barak's Hesitation and the Iron Chariots

And that kind of insecurity, hesitation, I think, is all throughout this Bible story we have today. I told you it was going to get a little weirder. I didn't have Tony read the whole passage to you; it goes on beyond this because I wanted to tell you about the crazy part. In this part, you get Barak's there and the Lord tells him, "I want you to face this incredible enemy. They have 900 of these iron chariots." Which by the way, back then, you know, it says like, take 10,000 men against these 900 iron chariots, and you're like, "Oh man, they're going to smash it." It's like, no, this is kind of like—think of it as 900 tanks versus 10,000 people with sticks. That was kind of the matchup that was getting ready to happen. And so it's a bit intimidating for Barak to get this message, but he feels like this is the direction God has given to him.

And instead of just saying, "Here I am, Lord. Yes, I have faith," Barak does this move. Deborah—I imagine he called her Debbie. I don't know, maybe not. She was a judge. Probably Deborah. Okay. "Deborah, are you going to go? If you go, I'll go, but I'm not doing it by myself." Over the years, this little dialogue has been interpreted in a lot of ways. Now, if Barak is seen as a person of great faith because he was involved in all this, but it, you know, this thing about like, "Well, I don't know, I'll go if you go, but if you don't go, I'm not going," it doesn't seem—I mean, to me, when I read it, I just think like, "Yikes, dude. You know, come on, you got the God on your side." But you know, definitely the way that it's been read nicer for him is to say that well, but he understood that he should have the Lord with him, and since Deborah was the judge that God had appointed over the people, that taking Deborah with him was really bringing God with him and having the blessings of God in this battle.

Okay, I guess that's a way to read it. It makes him sound better that way. The other way to read it is to say that like, he was a little scared and he just didn't want to do this alone. He wasn't so sure and he didn't—wasn't quite sure he was the right person for it, maybe. But anyway, as the story goes on, I'll let you know how it goes. They get to the mountain, and then about the time all these iron chariots show up, it starts to rain really heavily. There's like a flash flood. So this nice solid plane, which would have been great with iron chariots to just mow over the Israelites, turns into a muddy mosh pit. It goes all Woodstock on them.

And these iron chariots then get all stuck in the mud. And so there it says in the passage that they just—that they were terrified by the Israelites. And it doesn't make sense if you know about warfare back then that they would have been terrified because they had the iron chariots. But the thing is that we know a little bit more about the story, because in the next chapter, they sing a song about it. There's like a whole song. It's like, "You didn't know this, but Judges, in addition to being a crazy book of the Bible, it's got a musical in it as well that kicks off in chapter 5." But they sing about this event, and you find out about the water. And so that would explain how they got trapped.

Jael and the Tent Peg

So what's the leader, Sisera, do with all the nice iron chariots stuck in the mud? He goes, "Ah, I'm out of here," and he goes running away. Meanwhile, he heads over to this encampment where they had another nation that had made peace with Sisera's nation and saying like, "We're not going to stand in your way. We'll be neutral through this." And so he's like, "Oh, I can hide out in here." So he goes to this tent where this woman is and basically invites himself in, which—that's a no-no. But anyway, he does it anyway because, you know, he's big bad warlord. He's going to go in there and do whatever he wants. And he tells her, he's like, "You need to give me something to drink. I'm thirsty." And he's all tired and exhausted, and he lays down, and she says, "Oh, I'm not just going to get you some water; I'm going to get you some warm milk." And so basically, she gives him some warm milk and a blanket and tucks him in.

It's kind of a humorous image in my mind. It's like, "Okay, little warlord, you go to sleep now. Here's your little—little warm milk." Because what does it do if you're tired and exhausted? Drink some warm milk, right? Right out. And that's what she was counting on, because this woman faced with the situation—oh, by the way, before he zones out, he's like, "Oh, and by the way, guard the door." He tells her to go guard the door, if anyone comes, you just tell them nobody's here. She's like, "Okay, yeah, I'll do that." And she goes, and she gets a tent peg—they used to like secure the tents because that was the job of the women in the encampments back then. So Jael is her name, and she probably had done this a thousand times of setting up tents as they would move around. It was a regular job she would have done. And so what did she do? She didn't go for a sword to deal with this guy. She didn't put on some armor. She went to the thing that she knew how to do. And she grabbed a tent peg and she grabbed a hammer. And this is where it gets a little gross: takes him out.

Now I realize like this doesn't feel like a Bible lesson. This feels like a horror story now, Pastor Rob. But you got to realize this is war. This is warfare thousands of years ago. And her life is in danger as well with having him there, and their people have not exactly been kind to her people along the way. And so she takes him out. The glory of this moment Deborah

has told to Barak is not going to come at your hand; it's going to be at the hand of a woman. The fact that we have Deborah as this female leader and that the victory in battle happens at the hands of Jael, this non-Israelite woman, are all unexpected turns.

Finding Our Part

But what we find through all this is that God's going to find a way. And I think there's some other lessons for us to learn in this. With Barak, what we understand is that like, he was hesitant simply to believe. I think you know that song that Matt sang, "I Will Follow"—it's like Barak did the first draft of that song, you know? Instead of saying, "I will follow you," it's like, "I will follow you if you come with me though, because otherwise I won't do it." But we're called into a devotion that's ready to follow. And sometimes we have to look for who's that person that we need to follow. And so if there's any wisdom in what Barak did—if instead of just looking at as cowardice, maybe what he recognized is that Deborah was the one that was needed. If you get into the details of the story, the other thing you're going to find out is that when the iron chariots all showed up at the bottom of the hill and it was raining and the mud was starting to form, in the biblical text, it tells us that Deborah basically has to go over to Barak and go, "Hey, get down there! Get down there! Get into it!" because otherwise he was just sitting back. I imagine just doing this, you know, just I don't know. And Deborah was like, "You get into that." Sometimes we need to have people in our lives who will lead us, who will push us, who will encourage us.

The other lesson I think we pull from this is you have this figure of Jael, which in the later passages I was telling you about—no, she didn't go to a sword. She didn't put on armor. She grabbed a tent peg. She took that very basic and unassuming skill that she had and used it, and yeah, in a very violent way. It's in the middle of war and it's messy. But nonetheless, I think that this scripture is trying to show us that God's going to accomplish things in all sorts of ways. And instead of getting caught up on the violence of the situation, realize that she just simply used the skill that she had. And each one of you has particular gifts and abilities and skills that don't make sense in terms of service always. But every once in a while, there's that opportunity to help someone in a way that's so very unique.

I love that about sometimes in our Needs Among Us ministry, there's just these unique situations come up and we're like, "Well, I don't know if anyone in the church has that skill," and all of a sudden we find out the person who sat in section three here, row 12, that happens to be a thing they do all the time. To realize that the little gifts and abilities that you have can turn into amazing blessings in this lifetime and might be called upon to be used.

Now, some of you might be thinking to yourselves, "Yeah, I don't often find myself though in a situation where I feel like God is calling me to act, where God is calling me to do

something." And I guess my response to that is, "Well, maybe you should. Maybe part of the problem is that we're not often looking for where God might be pointing us or nudging us. Maybe if we manage to live our lives and never notice the little nudges from God or the direction that we're getting or the calling that God has for us in our life, maybe that's us missing something." And I have no doubt that God will find a way to make it happen with or without you, but you miss out on the opportunity to be part of that.

And so maybe we each need to be looking for these opportunities for us to use whatever basic skill or gift or ability or just attitude that we have. Because what I'm certain of is that there's plenty of need out there. There's plenty of pain. There's plenty of brokenness. And for every single one of those moments where there's something that's broken, there is someone else who has been gifted with the ability to be a healer, a fixer, a helper, or a friend. And that person is you. Just got to look for where that opportunity is. For I have no doubt that God has an intention to use your heart and your mind and your soul. We just have to be looking for the opportunity and to believe that we might be called into that and to look for who maybe we need to follow into that.

This is the opportunity of our faith. Let's not miss it.

Hallelujah and amen.