

Heroes of the Faith – 1. Deborah

Judges 4:4-10, 23-24

July 23, 2023

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Earlier this week, we hosted a Neighborhood Block Party here at Messiah Church... More than 300 people came to church, enjoying really delicious hot dogs, Sugar Mama's Ice cream, music, games, and good fellowship. How many of you were able to join us this week for our party? And it was great, right?

Some of my favorite moments were the joy of our grillers, making hotdogs in the rain -umbrellas in hand and smiles on their face. And watching one of our musician's three year old happily dance right here. Or, when after the band's closing song came to a close - a spontaneous group of elementary girls gathered to share their "church dance".

In addition to bringing together a lot of our Messiah family, it was a great opportunity for us to meet and connect with our neighbors. And let me tell you: the neighborhood showed up! We had LOTS of families from the neighboring apartments, and many of our Bloom families came, too. When I got home that night, I was tired - but also so energized, I had such a good time meeting new people and hearing stories.

But, as any of you who have planned a party or event know — none of this happened without effort or collaboration. Last spring, when our staff gathered for a planning day, we set the date and envisioned a bright, sunny, July evening where we could come together for a party. From that moment, and the many weeks to follow, our staff began their work. Planning a meal, reserving and gathering games, recruiting volunteers to welcome, set up tables, and serve. Music was planned and practiced, we made signs special for the night and plotted out precisely what the parking lot would look like to accommodate our night.

And what happened? After weeks of drought, (June was the second driest on record!) the rain finally came. Just when our party was set to begin! I heard someone say we should plan a party next week too, just for the rain to continue!

But you know what? We were ready. Our staff and leaders had already made back up plans so that we could quickly pivot and move the party indoors. That we did! When the droplets began, everyone came together to help. Now, I'm talking: staff and volunteers. But also attendees and guests who happened to be standing by... everyone lended a hand to quickly pivot the party indoors.

It wasn't the party we had expected last spring when we began to plan, but it was a GREAT party. Hundreds of smiles. People talking and connecting with one another. Some neighbors who said this was "just what they needed" and figured if our church could adapt so quickly and be so welcoming — that they'd have to visit on Sunday, too.

I hope they do. But more than that, I am grateful for a community who showed up, who worked together, and planted seeds of welcome, belonging, and love in the minds and hearts of our neighbors. Good work, church.

All of this was possible because a group of people came together, sharing their unique gifts in partnership with others - so that we could have a great night of fun and connection. This is precisely the kind of thing we mean when we talk, or preach, about God calling us to share our gifts with love. Why, we might even call you Heroes of Faith when you do!

This morning, we are beginning a new series, called just that: Heroes of the Faith. Through the next few weeks, we will be learning the stories of four people who show courage and resilience, offering us models for our own lives. We'll be reminded that heroes don't live only on the big screen — but can be you and me, too.

The first hero of faith we are hearing from is Deborah. Her story is told in the book of Judges, which is an Old Testament book, offering a collection of stories about heroes from the early days of Israel's history.

Collectively, they tell stories of a people in trouble (often of their own making), who are delivered by God who hears our cries and is present to our needs.

During this time of judges, Israel was in tense relationships with other tribes around them. Many leaders in Judges represent those who were in some manner on the margins: women, children born outside of primary marriage, younger sons, and so on. This serves to remind us that the true leader of Israel is God, and that God isn't restricted to typical boundaries or ideas of who shall lead. As we learned in the story of David earlier this summer, God looks to the heart.

Deborah is a prophet and judge, responsible for leading the military. (I love this image, by the way - it's giving me Wonder Woman vibes). She is a military strategist and warrior, known to be a person of great wisdom, revelation, and discernment. Her name describes her as "a fiery woman".

She is called the "Mother of Israel" because of her care for her people — she provided military and political security, addressed economic justice, and helped her people have more equal access to resources around them. Not only that, but Deborah is the only judge cast in an "unequivocally positive light" and the only judge "already in divine service before being called up for military action" (Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam*). Her legacy is summarized at the end of Judges 5 in this way: "Because of her the land had rest for forty years".

But now, I'm getting ahead of myself a bit. When we first meet Deborah, she is seated in the shade of a palm tree in hill country. She is doing her work as a judge, settling disputes. But as the story picks up, "puts on her prophet hat" and brings a word from God. She summons one of the military commanders, Barak, and tells him that God wants him to battle the Canaanites. Their commander, Sisera, has a great army who are well trained, well armored and well equipped. But, Deborah declares, God will hand them over.

Barak demands that Deborah goes with him. This tells us a couple things: not only is Deborah equipped to be a warrior in battle, but also — Barak sees Deborah as one anointed by God, and through her, he experiences God's presence. Deborah agrees, but adds this, "I'll go with you, However when I do, God will hand over Sisera to be defeated by a woman."

And so they do, this is where our reading ended today - but the rest of chapter four tells the story of their battle and Sisera's death. Spoiler: he was killed at the hand of a woman, another fierce and courageous one, named Jael. If you receive our daily devotions by email, you'll get to know her this week, too.

Alright - so I am aware that few of us are well-versed in the book of Judges or know Deborah's story very well. So, you might be wondering, what's the take away here? As always, there are many lessons we can learn through stories in scripture. But as I read Deborah's story this week, here are three things I hear:

1. God is present to our needs and struggles.
2. God calls us to "the good fight" together in community.
3. God will see us through.

One of the most continuous stories of God throughout scripture is that God is present to our needs and struggles. In the Garden of Eden, our perfect harmony with God was broken — but sense then, God has remained faithful to us. Continuing to walk alongside us, to pick us up when we fall, forgive us when we sin, and see us through every struggle in life.

For the people of Israel, as we read their story in Judges - we see a pattern on repeat: The people mess up and live selfishly. The people ask for God's help. God hears. Then, God shows up to deliver and forgive them.

Again and again, this pattern repeats. Which might tell us something about how forgetful or limited humanity is. But it definitely tells us something about God. It shows us that God is one who does not give up, who is forever eager to restore harmony to our relationship. And, that:

1. God is present to our needs and struggles.

Over and over again, we see God persistently present to our needs and struggles. In our story today, Israel was struggling to find their way, and some of it was by their own doing - though certainly not all. Responding to them, God gave them Deborah. Through her unique strengths and gifts - those of wisdom in discerning, clarity in leading, and strength in battle — God was present to the people and their needs.

When we were early in our marriage, Luke was appointed to a new congregation, and it meant that we would be moving into a new community. As excited as I was for his new appointment, I was also really nervous and afraid. I was serving a church in another small town, so wouldn't be working in the town we lived. We were moving further away from my family and closest friends. I was really worried that it wouldn't ever feel like "home" and was afraid I wouldn't make friends.

You see, I grew up in a small town and community that has been part of my family for several generations. Four generations have lived on the family farm. Four generations that were part of our church — my family literally built the building, and now their final resting places are in the cemetery which surrounds the country church. But both sides of my family were deeply rooted in this space - one of my grandparents even served there as pastor for some time (which, incidentally led to my parents meeting).

So you understand, then, that I had no experience moving. While I had moved to St Paul for college and grad school, I did so with really close friends and family nearby. I brought my community with me. But now, I felt like we were on uncharted territory.

Looking back, I can see I probably suffered some depression during this transition. But at the time, I just knew I was worried and afraid. I prayed that God would help me make roots, would guide me to meeting friends, and help me find home in this new town.

Echoing the stories of many others, God was present to my needs and struggles.

God had led our family, not only to really, really great congregations for us to serve. But he surrounded us by neighbors who were eager to welcome us in, and a small town that was thrilled to call us 'family'. After Calvin was born, I joined a new mom's group at the community center. I began attending story time at the library. And, I found my people there. God had heard my cries, seen my struggles, and responded.

It took time, of course. It didn't happen overnight. And it required some action on my part, to attend those classes, to talk with others, and dare to 'put myself out there'. But God was faithfully present to me, guiding and giving me strength. And the other thing God gave me at that time, was confidence that we could do this again. So years later, when we were appointed to a new community and congregation: I was ready. I knew then, that home was where you made it.

Can you think of times of struggles or need, where God was present to you? Perhaps at a juncture of a big life decision, or in the midst of some heavy grief or worries. Maybe your season of struggle didn't feel all together very "special," but you simply lacked a sense of direction for life. How was God present to your needs in that time?

I have a hunch, that one thing you'll notice, is part of how God was present to you was through community. This is true in my own story, that it was through our neighbors, the other new moms, a small group of clergy women who met weekly for coffee, and even our beloved librarian, that I found home.

And it was true for Deborah. While God appointed her as judge and prophet at this time, God was also present to her needs and struggles. God showed faithfulness in giving her wisdom and discernment. But God also gave her a whole community of people to work with. This is because:

1. God is present to our needs and struggles.

2. God calls us to “the good fight” together in community.

In their growing fight with Sisera, Deborah called for Barak to gather 10,000 men and attack the opposing army. Israel had long been ruled by the Canaanite’s and through Deborah, God was bringing an end to this. Barak was a military commander, whose name means “lightning”. If we remember that Deborah’s described as a “fiery woman” in her naming — we can see now that God is bringing forth to battle Fire and Lightning.

These are powerful elements and powerful people. But their ability to follow God in this “good fight” comes because they work together, and they trust each other. Barak was hesitant to go to battle without Deborah and see through their work together that their gifts complement one another.

They have confidence, skill, and experience as they lead their people into battle. All of this, they will need, too - because the Israelites are not a professional army, like the troops they will meet. The story of their battle is told in both Judges chapters 4 & 5 - the former as a narrative account, and the latter as a poem, written by Deborah and recognized as one of the oldest writings in all of scripture.

Both descriptions tell us this: the enemy was defeated. Sisera’s entire army was met with the sword. No one survived. But Sisera fled on foot. He found himself met by the hospitality of one whom he thought would be a friendly host. Instead, we meet Jael. She is another less commonly known woman in scripture, but one who shows great courage and strength in following God. And by Jael’s hand, Sisera is killed.

For any of you who enjoy action movies - this is a great story for you. But here is what I want you to notice in the middle of the active and sometimes gruesome imagery: Deborah, our great leader and judge, did not work alone. Instead, she was joined by Barak, by Jael, and by ten thousand soldiers — all of whom trusted that God was, indeed, present to their needs and struggles.

So it is with us, God invites us to live in community with one another. It is our presence, our courage, our care for one another that is a primary way in which God is present to our needs. I’ve told you a bit about the people who have shown up for me in previous seasons of life.

But who has God given as your community? You might list a handful - your closest friends, the faith group you’re part of here, maybe one or two solid coworkers who have really supported you well. These are gifts of God to be celebrated, nurtured, and cherished. They are signs of God’s faithful presence to you.

And every community in which we are a part requires nurturing. They give us our own opportunities to practice showing up, to practice forgiveness and trust, to extend kindness and love. The communities and people God has surrounded you with, are where we experience, practice, and share the gifts and love of God.

Last week, my family was able to take a vacation. One of my uncles joked that traveling with kids isn’t really “vacation”, but is a “change of scenery”... and maybe he is right. Because it is a lot of work to travel with little ones. But we sure had fun, too!

My family flew to Cincinnati - it was our boys first flights, and they loved it so much they are already making pitches for our next vacation! Right now, their top choices are: returning to Cincinnati, going to California, or bringing Grandpa to Hawaii (because that would be the 50th state he has visited). They’ve got dreams, our boys!

The reason we went to Ohio, is so my husband could visit with his two closest friends and roommates from seminary. The three of them lived and studied together in Southern California, and now are each serving churches around the country. Gathered, were 3 couples - and between us, we had: 5 pastors, 7 children, 3 states, 6 congregations, and 3 denominations.

And we had a blast! These were the people that had seen each other through some really hard seasons in life. But now, this was the first time they had all been together in one place in 15 years — it felt as if no time had

passed. The laughter, smiles, and hugs came quickly. Our children became fast friends. And we all easily slid into good conversation.

This time away really felt like vacation, it was restorative and restful, even if all our feet ached from walking so much, or our tummies ached from laughing so hard. Time with good friends was a reminder that God has been present to our needs, and gave us people to support us throughout our life. And together, we made “the good fight” to follow God best we could, serving our congregations, loving our neighbors in the places God has guided us.

It is through the presence of others that God is often most clearly revealed in our world. Which leads us to the third lesson from Deborah’s story today:

1. God is present to our needs and struggles.
2. God calls us to “the good fight” together in community.
3. God will see us through.

No matter what we are experiencing in our lives, God will see us through. It won’t usually be as dramatic as a battle scene like Deborah and her people. And it won’t always look exactly like what we “think” it should look like. But God will be present to our needs, surround us with community, and see us through every season.

God called Deborah to lead the people, and through the partnerships of Barak, Jael, and their soldiers - they defeated Sisera. Their story closes with this, the last verse of Judges 5: “and the land was peaceful for forty years.”

And what I love about this, is that not only was God faithful to Deborah and the Israelites. Not only, did Deborah’s “yes” to God lead to many good things for their community. But, it also tells us that this is a season, and another will come.

Israel had a season of conflict. A season of battle. And now, a season - forty years worth, of peace.

But that would not be the end of their story, too. Troubles would brew again, and God would raise up another leader, gather another community, to meet the needs of God’s people in that time. But just as God has done since creation, God will be present and see us through.

This happens through God’s love and faithfulness, and is experienced by the people of God.

How is it that God has seen you through struggles in your own life?

How is it that God is calling you to be a community that sees others through their own season?

I started today, by talking about our Block Party last week... and I shared with you the ways that I saw our community coming together. To carry tables in from the rain, to serve food and games, to welcome and greet others in love.

This is an example of God being present to us, and gathering a community together. But it is also one example of God seeing through a hard time. Because we don’t know yet the full impact of last night, or of our worship today for that matter. We don’t yet know all the stories of how God was at work through the people of Messiah last week.

- How a Mom, new to this area, was struggling to meet friends — but at our party, met a neighbor. And through our hospitality, found a place that just might become a church home.

- Or the story of one of our own members, who has been trying to find ways to get active and serve, and hasn't found just the right fit yet. But this week, as they mingled and served during our party found a "right fit".
- Or maybe stories that haven't happened yet — where one of our children who found community and belonging right here, so that years from now they can grow up to be a pastor or a teacher or someone that shares that same love with others.

God is always at work in our lives, both in ways that are easy to name and see, and often, in ways that hover just below the surface, working in ways we least expect. Yet the promise of God remains the same: God is with you, God calls you into community, and God will see you through every season of life.

Thanks be to God for this, and thanks be to God for you. Let us pray:

We thank you, Lord, that you love to do extraordinary things through ordinary people like us. Help us to see the ways you are present in and through the needs and struggles of our lives. Continue to raise up leaders and community to embody your goodness and love. And give to each and every one of us, the presence of power of your Spirit, that we might have confidence to live, to love, and to serve in your name. Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of July 23, 2023

Weekly Prayer

God, you are worthy of our celebration and praise. You are a God who moves mountains and yet also uses us to create community and do your deeds in the world. May our time in prayer and study prepare us to rise to the situations in front of us so we can meet them with leadership, wisdom, and love. Amen.

Monday, July 24

Scripture: Judges 2:16-19

Then the LORD raised up leaders to rescue them from the power of these raiders. But they wouldn't even obey their own leaders because they were unfaithful, following other gods and worshipping them. They quickly deviated from the way of their ancestors, who had obeyed the LORD's commands, and didn't follow their example. The LORD was moved by Israel's groaning under those who oppressed and crushed them. So the LORD would raise up leaders for them, and the LORD would be with the leader, and he would rescue Israel from the power of their enemies as long as that leader lived. But then when the leader died, they would once again act in ways that weren't as good as their ancestors', going after other gods, to serve them and to worship them. They wouldn't drop their bad practices or hardheaded ways.

Observation

Today, we are backing up a few chapters - in verses that set the tone of what is to come. In verse 16, we're told God raised up leaders to rescue the people. While the people struggled in direction and obedience, God was faithful. God continued to bring leaders to them, even while the people strayed.

Application

These verses remind me of two things: (1) God's faithfulness and (2) humanity's incredible ability to misstep and forgive. These two seem to live together in rotation; God will always be faithful in bringing us leaders, directions, and a way forward - even when we forget or misstep time and again. Reflecting on your own life: Where has God provided you direction as you strayed? Who have been leaders that have guided you to live in the way of God?

Prayer

Faithful God, thank you for your enduring presence and never-ending love and care. Help me to follow you, and to seek leaders who embody your goodness and grace. Forgive me, dear God, when I misstep and stray. Help me find my way back to you. Amen.

Tuesday, July 25

Scripture: Judges 4:1-10

After Ehud had died, the Israelites again did things that the LORD saw as evil. So the LORD gave them over to King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, and he was stationed in Harosheth-ha-goiim. The Israelites cried out to the LORD because Sisera had nine hundred iron chariots and had oppressed the Israelites cruelly for twenty years. Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was a leader of Israel at that time. She would sit under Deborah's palm tree between Ramah and Bethel in the Ephraim highlands, and the Israelites would come to her to settle disputes. She sent word to Barak, Abinoam's son, from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "Hasn't the LORD, Israel's God, issued you a command? 'Go and assemble at Mount Tabor, taking ten thousand men from the people of Naphtali and Zebulun with you. I'll lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, to assemble with his chariots and troops against you at the Kishon River, and then I'll help you overpower him.'" Barak replied to her, "If you'll go with me, I'll go; but if not, I won't go." Deborah answered, "I'll definitely go with you. However, the path you're taking won't bring honor to you, because the LORD will hand over Sisera to a woman." Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. He summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh, and ten thousand men marched out behind him. Deborah marched out with him too.

Observation

We're introduced to the prophet and judge Deborah here. She is one of just five women named as a prophet in the Old Testament. She is a charismatic leader who is leading during a turbulent time. While most of us are likely unfamiliar with the book of Judges, I think it's easy to see Deborah's courage and strength as a leader. She has seen where God is guiding them, names a leader in Barak, and is prepared to march with them.

Application

What has God called you to do that required bravery and strength? Deborah, like many prophets and leaders in scripture, is an unlikely candidate for the job. And yet, she trusted God's faithfulness to be present to her, equip her, and guide her to lead. Similarly, God is present to you, guiding and equipping you to the places you are called. How might you muster the courage of Deborah today?

Prayer

God, give me courage today. Help me to hear your voice clearly, and trust that you are with me. Amen.

Wednesday, July 26**Scripture: Judges 4:11-23**

Now Heber the Kenite had moved away from the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' father-in-law, and had settled as far away as Elon-bezaananim, which is near Kedesh.

When it was reported to Sisera that Barak, Abinoam's son, had marched up to Mount Tabor, Sisera summoned all of his nine hundred iron chariots and all of the soldiers who were with him from Harosheth-ha-goiim to the Kishon River. Then Deborah said to Barak, "Get up! This is the day that the LORD has handed Sisera over to you. Hasn't the LORD gone out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men behind him. The LORD threw Sisera and all the chariots and army into a panic before Barak; Sisera himself got down from his chariot and fled on foot. Barak pursued the chariots and the army all the way back to Harosheth-ha-goiim, killing Sisera's entire army with the sword. No one survived. Meanwhile, Sisera had fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was peace between Hazor's King Jabin and the family of Heber the Kenite. Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come in, sir, come in here. Don't be afraid." So he went with her into the tent, and she hid him under a blanket. Sisera said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink. I'm thirsty." So she opened a jug of milk, gave him a drink, and hid him again. Then he said to her, "Stand at the entrance to the tent. That way, if someone comes and asks you, 'Is there a man here?' you can say, 'No.'" But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent stake and a hammer. While Sisera was sound asleep from exhaustion, she tiptoed to him. She drove the stake through his head and down into the ground, and he died. Just then, Barak arrived after chasing Sisera. Jael went out to meet him and said, "Come and I'll show you the man you're after." So he went in with her, and there was Sisera, lying dead, with the stake through his head. So on that day God brought down Canaan's King Jabin before the Israelites.

Observation

We see the climactic ending of Deborah's leadership here - "on that day, God brought down Canaan's King before the Israelites" (v23). One thing I noticed, (and likely you did, too) is that Deborah worked with many others. With Barak and ten thousand men they defeated Sisera. Then, when we think he might have escaped, Jael (another fierce woman not well-known) completed the task, by hammering a stake through his head.

Application

God has called all of us to live in faithful service. Some of us are called as leaders. Some of us are called for short periods of time. Most of us are called unexpectedly. All of us are called to work with others. Who are the people whom God has brought into your life, to serve alongside? How do your gifts complement and balance one another? Celebrate these relationships today!

Prayer

God of life, you have made us in relationship with others. Thank you for the gift of family, friends, and colleagues with whom I share my life. Help me find ways to celebrate and honor them today. Amen.

Thursday, July 27

Scripture: Judges 5:1-9

At that time, Deborah and Barak, Abinoam's son, sang:

When hair is long in Israel,

when people willingly offer themselves—bless the LORD!

Hear, kings!

Listen, rulers!

I, to the LORD,

I will sing.

I will make music to the LORD,

Israel's God.

LORD, when you set out from Seir,

when you marched out from Edom's fields, the land shook,

the sky poured down,

the clouds poured down water.

The mountains quaked

before the LORD, the one from Sinai,

before the LORD, the God of Israel.

In the days of Shamgar, Anath's son,

in the days of Jael, caravans ceased.

Those traveling by road

kept to the backroads.

Villagers disappeared;

they disappeared in Israel,

until you, Deborah, arose,

until you arose as a mother in Israel.

When they chose new gods,

then war came to the city gates.

Yet there wasn't a shield or spear to be seen

among forty thousand in Israel!

My heart is with Israel's commanders,

who willingly offered themselves among the people—bless the LORD!

Observation

In these verses, Deborah (a judge & prophet) and Barak (a military commander) sing a song of praise to God. You can hear their willingness to offer themselves for others, along with their gratitude that others have come together to rally for their cause. They sing of God's faithfulness in their lives, calling and equipping them to service.

Application

What would your song of praise to God sound like, if you wrote one reflecting your life? Can you see a common thread throughout your life, connecting ways that God has called you to service? Where do you see God's faithfulness through the joys and challenges of your life?

Prayer

Saving God, we celebrate the ways you are active in our lives. We celebrate the ways you use us to make a difference. May we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving to ministry that creates partnership and builds community. Amen.

Friday, July 28

Scripture: Judges 5:10-18

You who ride white donkeys,
 who sit on saddle blankets,
 who walk along the road: tell of it.
To the sound of instruments at the watering places,
 there they repeat the LORD's victories,
 his villagers' victories in Israel.
Then the LORD's people marched down to the city gates.
 "Wake up, wake up, Deborah!
 Wake up, wake up, sing a song!
Arise, Barak!
 Capture your prisoners,
 Abinoam's son!"
Then those who remained marched down against royalty;
 the LORD's people marched down against warriors.
From Ephraim they set out into the valley,
 after you, Benjamin, with your people!
From Machir commanders marched down,
 and from Zebulun those carrying the official's staff.
The leaders of Issachar came along with Deborah;
 Issachar was attached to Barak,
 and was sent into the valley behind him.
Among the clans of Reuben
 there was deep soul-searching.
"Why did you stay back among the sheep pens,
 listening to the music for the flocks?"
For the clans of Reuben
 there was deep soul-searching.
Gilead stayed on the other side of the Jordan,
 and Dan, why did he remain with the ships?
Asher stayed by the seacoast,
 camping at his harbors.
Zebulun is a people that readily risked death;
 Naphtali too in the high countryside.

Observation

The song of Deborah and Barak continues today, praising God while recounting the battle they had just completed. Here, we notice the sounds of their community - the ones that come to support Deborah and Barak in their work. Nothing that God calls us to is done in isolation. In our command to love God and love neighbor, we *must* work with others.

Application

Earlier this week, we uplifted the community that surrounds us. Today, I wonder: who are the leaders who help guide you? How have they taught you to follow God well? How do you sing songs of support to them, especially in troubled times?

Prayer

God, thank you for leaders who teach and encourage. Thank you for the people in my life who have supported me. And for those who have been trailblazers, who have “fought the good fight” so that I might experience something new. Continue to raise up leaders and prophets who guide us in following you. Amen.

Saturday, July 29

Scripture: Judges 5:19-31

Kings came and made war;
the kings of Canaan fought
at Taanach by Megiddo's waters,
but they captured no spoils of silver.
The stars fought from the sky;
from their orbits they fought against Sisera.
The Kishon River swept them away;
the advancing river, the Kishon River.
March on, my life, with might!
Then the horses' hooves pounded
with the galloping, galloping of their stallions.
“Curse Meroz,” says the LORD's messenger,
“curse its inhabitants bitterly,
because they didn't come to the LORD's aid,
to the LORD's aid against the warriors.”
May Jael be blessed above all women;
may the wife of Heber the Kenite
be blessed above all tent-dwelling women.
He asked for water, and she provided milk;
she presented him cream in a majestic bowl.
She reached out her hand for the stake,
her strong hand for the worker's hammer.
She struck Sisera;
she crushed his head;
she shattered and pierced his skull.
At her feet he sank, fell, and lay flat;
at her feet he sank, he fell;
where he sank, there he fell—dead.
Through the window she watched,
Sisera's mother looked longingly through the lattice.
“Why is his chariot taking so long to come?
Why are the hoofbeats of his chariot horses delayed?”
Her wisest attendants answer;
indeed, she replies to herself:
“Wouldn't they be finding and dividing the loot?
A girl or two for each warrior;
loot of colored cloths for Sisera;
loot of colored, embroidered cloths;
two colored, embroidered cloths
as loot for every neck.”
May all your enemies perish like this, LORD!
But may your allies be like the sun, rising in its strength.

Observation

Their song, and this chapter, close today. Here we read again of Jael who showed quiet courage and helped save Israel from Sisera. Her story reminds us that (1) sometimes God calls us to act in brave ways that are also quiet or secluded from the crowd, and (2) that sometimes following God is bigger than following the rules.

Her hand was the one which brought death to Sisera and completed the work of Deborah and Barak. But doing so also betrayed cultural norms and laws. Still, she said yes to God and helped protect God's people.

Application

Jael's story is one that gives confidence to many people; a Google search will show you many images of artists depicting her bravery. Most of us will not find us following God by using a tent spike. But all of us will be challenged at some point in *how* we follow. Do we dare follow God if it means going against a cultural law? An unspoken rule? The "way it's always been"? Can we trust God to guide us, even in uncharted territory?

Prayer

God, you have called me to places in which I cannot see the ending. Give me courage to follow you, even if it is scary. Help me trust that you are with me now and always. Amen.