

Sermon Text for May 9, 2021- Mother's Day

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John 19:25-27, Judges 4:4-10

“The story of Deborah”

Today we transition away from Philippians and Paul's letter to a community and a church that he knows and that he loves and that he tries to infuse with joy as they face an unprecedented crisis not of their own making, but as a result of what is happening in the society around them. That may sound familiar to us as we face an unprecedented crisis, not of our own making, as we navigate these uncharted waters together and hear and embrace the joy that Paul was passing on to that community in Philippi.

We may be moving on from Philippians but not from the joy. We need to maintain that and keep that as our own since it has at its foundation and its root a relationship with our Savior Jesus Christ. That will never and can never be taken from us. Historically as your pastor I've taken a book of the Bible and we have made our way through it. We began in 2011 with John, and then we looked at James, and then we transitioned to Genesis and then we looked at Romans, and then we looked at Acts of the Apostles, and then finally Philippians. Along with our 78 day challenge my desire is that each person will become not only a student of Scripture but be able to understand the life giving qualities that Scripture is able to give to each one of us. Interspersed in there we did a series on Walking in His Footsteps which were reflections on journeys to Israel, we looked at the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer, and now we begin another series that doesn't take us through a book of the Bible.

This series is entitled Stories of the Bible. What I discovered is that if we just focus on certain books in the Bible to preach through, and even though it will be completely covered in our challenges as we read through the entire Bible, there are certain Bible stories that we all ought to know that I feel that have to be covered in this context, from the pulpit. For example how can you spend your life in this church and not hear about Daniel and the lion's den, or David and Goliath, Moses and the plagues, Samson and Delilah, Joshua fighting the battle of Jericho and so on. We will be covering those stories and many others during this time. If you have a favorite Bible story and you want to make sure I cover it send me an email or put a note in my mailbox here at church and I promise you we will cover it if we haven't already.

Today is Mother's Day. We are going to look at two Scriptures who depict mothers. The first Scripture that we read gives us some insight into the mother of Jesus and the important role

that she plays not only in Scripture but also in later Christian thought. We will then look at the mother of Israel, Deborah, who represents all the women of faith as not only an example but also potentially even the actual presence of God himself. Let's read.

READ

Let's start with Jesus, that's always a good place to start. There are a number of times that we see Jesus with his mother. We see in Luke 2:48-49 when Jesus and his mother interact and it isn't the best conversation as Jesus tends to scold his mom and dad for worrying about him, after all, didn't they know that he needed to be in his Father's house? We also see Jesus and his mom interacting in John 2:3-5 where Jesus and his disciples crash a wedding and his mom says that the wine is going to run out and again, the interaction leaves us wanting with Jesus calling his mom "woman" but then doing her bidding. We see in Mark 3:21 and then again 31-35 where his mother and his brothers and sisters have come to take him home because others have said that he had lost his mind.

Today, Jesus is at the cross and you have to consider what he is going through, as he is being tortured, and one of his last thoughts and one of his last actions here on earth was to take care of his mother. That has to say something about Jesus. In the first century one of the primary responsibilities of the oldest son, of which we know Jesus was, when they were dying was to ensure that his mother was taken care of through a direct commission. We read in antiquity a pact that has been made such as: "I leave to you my mother to be taken care of". That is what we are witnessing on the cross.

But Mary appears again and is seen in Acts 1:12-14 within the group of believers and disciples who continue to do Jesus' bidding. So what does this all mean? We have to recognize on this mother's day that the role that Mary, the mother of Jesus, plays is significant. As Protestants we can't diminish her role. She is an important, even a crucial, figure in Scripture. Her role and the presence of other women in Scripture playing similar roles is not a one off, but rather it is incredibly consistent. Mary is not just someone to emulate but also one whom God uses principally to advance the Gospel. If Paul is able to say use my example, then we can also say the same for Mary as well.

God has consistently placed women in leadership all through Scripture and we tend to overlook it. The women at the tomb were the first to give the resurrection story and that story they didn't fall into but rather God gave it to them to give to other so that the Gospel could be proclaimed. If you have little girls in your family do not eliminate their potential to be future messengers of the Gospel as pastors and church leaders. I would love this church to be the

church that cranks out women of faith who lead the kingdom of God in the 21st century. Can you catch that vision with me?

We now find ourselves in Judges with Deborah. We read in 5:31 that she ruled for 40 years. She is described as a prophetess. Now, keep in mind that the name Deborah can mean two things: it can mean bee, which most commentators use to describe her, but her name also contains the root for Word. DABAR, when God spoke to create it is DABAR. As a prophetess she is given God's word to not only speak, but also, now catch this, to represent. She was the only one of her time that was given the Word of God. The Word of God at that time was found in her, and only found in her.

She is also described as the wife of Lappidoth which in Hebrew can also mean the torch bearer. So really it could be that here Deborah is described as the torch bearer. What does that mean? We see that example of torch bearers in other places in Scripture. Look at Zechariah 12:6- she is described as a conqueror. Look at Daniel 10:6 described as a victory, look at Isaiah 62:1 where she is described as a Savior.

She is also described as a Judge so like Samson and Gideon and those who went before her, she was responsible for the people of God. She was the mother of Israel for 40 years. How does that sit with you? I hope it isn't a scandal because if it is that isn't a problem with Scripture, it is a problem with you. Why does that not sit well with you?

We did this Bible story for the kids in preschool this past Friday. And we had Barak tell Deborah that he wasn't going to go into battle unless she went into battle first ahead of him, and as we read in vs. 10 Deborah went up ahead of him. I asked the kids why didn't Barak go first and they all said what we have been taught anytime we read this story, that Barak was afraid and so wanted her to go first, or he wanted her to prove herself before he went into the battle. But there is a different way to interpret that which eliminates the cowardice from Barak and places a certain amount of responsibility and presence that Deborah ought to have.

We see in Scripture often that the Israelites would not go into battle unless the ark of the covenant went before them first. This ark of the covenant represented the presence of God. They did not want to get ahead of God but rather they wanted to ensure that the presence of God would go before them and that way they knew that God was on their side.

Maybe what happens here is that Barak will not go into battle without Deborah as the future kings would not go into battle without the ark. It seems not only does Deborah speak for God, the DAVAR, but she also somehow embodies God's presence, at least in Barak's opinion. Deborah as a judge is seen as the Word of God and needed in battle in order to conquer.

Deborah serves for us not just as an example on this mother's day of a strong woman who led her nation into battle, but also as a way in which God chooses and has chosen to act in this world. We are the only ones who have kept limitations on what women can and cannot do especially in places such as these, what we call churches. What would happen if on this Mother's Day we made a commitment to women in this church, we made a commitment to the daughters of this church that we will no longer place limitations on how and in what manner they are able to be used by God, even as Deborah was used as his DAVAR, his spokesperson. May God bless us as we look to create a kingdom where all people are able to follow and serve God equally. Amen.