

“Brave, Courageous, and Bold”

May 14, 2017

Faith of Our Mothers series – 5th Sunday of Easter – Mother’s Day

SING v. 1 of *Hear Now the Voice of Deborah* by Edith Sinclair Downing:

*Hear now the voice of Deborah,
the prophetess who sings
a song to praise the Lord, her God,
who rules both princes, kings.
While sitting neath a shady tree
she welcomed those who came.
They heard her judge their piteous plight.
Could she their hope reclaim?*

When I thought about Deborah, the words “brave, courageous, and bold” came to mind. Then my mind went to an old record that I used to listen to - classic TV theme songs. And though it may be a strange connection, it was Wyatt Earp’s theme that came to mind:

*Wyatt Earp, Wyatt Earp
Brave, courageous and bold
Long live his fame and long live his glory
And long may his story be told.*

Except Deborah’s story isn’t always told.

Deborah is the only woman judge who is named in all of the book of Judges, but many times it’s Gideon and Samson whose names are remembered. And it’s not exactly like we understand a judge today. Judges did settle disputes between people and gave wise counsel and advice, but they also served as leaders who advised the military and led in government.

This is a time of transition before the twelve tribes of Israel functioned together with a king. The pattern of history looks like this. People sinned and fell under the rule of others. When they wanted to repent and return to God, then God raised up a faithful leader to help restore order - both morally and spiritually.

Here, Ehud dies, and the Israelites slip into disobedience. They turn away from God. They are conquered by the Canaanites. They seek God’s help, and that’s where Deborah comes in. Everyone knows who she is because of her wisdom as a judge. She’s also called a prophet.

Deborah joins the long line of women who display great faith and wisdom, creativity and smarts. From Shiphrah and Puah (the Hebrew midwives) and Miriam who

helped to save Moses to Queen Esther who helped to save her fellow Israelites and now to Deborah who is the ultimate encourager to Barak.

Deborah is trusted to give advice, even acting as a military advisor. She was clearly a leader and coach for Barak. She gives a whole new meaning to the phrase “fight like a girl.” She carries God’s vision and directs God’s people. She is strong, independent, and courageous.

The situation is this coalition of tribes, for whom Barak is a leader, going against a strong army. What we have is really a group of freedom fighters. They’ve been under Canaan’s control for 20 years, so it’s no wonder that Barak is uncertain about going against them!

The Canaanites are more established. They are more powerful and wealthier. They have a lot more weaponry - and more advanced weaponry - 900 iron chariots. The situation might have seemed hopeless to Barak who has people - we’re told 10,000 men. Either way, it’s a long shot, but Barak agrees to go on the condition that Deborah will go.

Deborah shows us that leadership requires two important qualities: the ability to encourage and the ability to inspire. Underneath all of it is a foundation of trust. She was able to call out gifts in others, encourage them to use the gifts they had, and stand alongside them even as they faced a difficult situation.

As we celebrate Mother’s Day, I invite you to think about those who have been spiritual mothers and mentors for you. Who has been there to remind you of God’s presence and power, to show you grace, and to inspire and encourage you? That’s who Deborah is for Barak.

All of us have been Barak - feeling uncertain of what we faced, feeling powerless or at least not as prepared as we wanted to be for what was ahead. We’ve needed people around us to restore our faith in ourselves and remember that we weren’t alone. We have others around us, and we have God to lead and guide us.

Who are your Deborahs? Who are the women who have encouraged you along the way? Who has been that person to tell you what you needed to hear - even when it wasn’t what you wanted to hear? Who has given you the kick, the push, or the nudge that you needed? Who has reminded you that God is with you and will help you?

Deborah offers some of the best qualities that we celebrate on Mother’s Day: a leader, an encourager, someone who nurtures, a teacher. May we remember all of the women and men who have been leaders, encouragers, nurturers, and teachers. I think of my mom and my dad, but also of countless others who have helped me to become who I am and continue to help me grow into who God calls me to be.

Today we receive new members, and we promised to support and encourage them in their walk with Christ. But there’s more to it. These folks are here because they feel a connection and a trust with this faith community. They feel welcomed, embraced, and able to serve God and others more fully as a part of this congregation.

They feel the love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit here. And we should praise God for it! What good news - that people feel encouraged to live their faith!

At the same time, it's a call for us to consider how we're keeping that promise to each other. How are we cultivating trust with one another and growing together in faith? How is the witness that we offer to the world encouraging others to believe that God loves them and cares about them?

After the Sisera is defeated, Deborah and Barak sing a song of God's victory where Deborah is called a "mother of Israel." She shows the best of what we can be for one another - someone who encourages and walks alongside, who doesn't just talk a good talk, but puts action behind what she says.

The end of the song they sing says this:

*"So may all your enemies perish, LORD!
But may all who love you be like the sun
when it rises in its strength."*

And we're told that there was peace for 40 years after this victory.

May all who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength. What a beautiful and powerful image! God values all of us. God needs all of us. God uses all of us. May we be brave, courageous, and bold in living the faith we claim.

Thanks be to God! AMEN.