

Sunday, August 21 2022 Pentecost 11

“Two Brave Women: Deborah and Jael”

Matthew 14:22-33 Judges 4-5

We continue in our Summer Worship Series of “At Your Request” with our topic for today being “Two Brave Women: Deborah and Jael”. Just who are these two women named in the Old Testament book of Judges with so many other men? And why are they called brave? Was it because of what they did? Their faith in God in the middle of controversy or a combination of these things.

I shared with you a brief summary of Deborah and Jael’s stories which are connected through one man- Barak. The stories of Deborah and Jael are found in the book of Judges in both prose and poetic forms. Their story is one of the many leaders-prophets, priests, kings and those held in high esteem. Judges were given a special position of authority as they helped to resolve conflicts amongst the people of Israel. Deborah was such a judge in Israel. She was only one of five women described as a prophet in the Old Testament – the others being Miriam, Huldah (2 Kings 22:14) Noadiah (Neh.6:14) and the unnamed ‘prophetess’ in Isaiah (8:3). The only other person who was said to be both prophet and judge was Samuel. She held court under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramal and Bethel in Mount Ephraim. This was her office; a place where people from all over the country would go so she could rule on their cases. Deborah was also a prophet and it was known that she received instructions from God. When this occurred, people listened for she was acknowledged by God and others were directly inspired to fulfil her just ruling in the Israelite community.

Deborah received instructions from God and called Barak was a general in the Israelite army and subordinate to Deborah. Deborah told Barak to get 10000 troops ready to attack Sisera King Jabin’s commander and their troops.

Barak didn’t want to go alone and told Deborah to go with him. Deborah prophesied again telling Barak, that he would not be successful in delivering Sisera. For Sisera would be delivered at the hands of a woman but not Deborah- but Jael.

The battle is set and the troops are aligned. But just then a major downpour occurs and Sisera's army moving about in chariots get stuck in the mud. The Israelites who are on foot have the advantage to win against those stuck in the mud. Yet Sisera flees and comes to Jael's tent.

Jael was a tent-dweller. Her family were tinsmiths who made farming utensils, domestic items and weapons. They traveled whenever they could find work. The campsite had to be close to the battlefield because her family would be the ones making and supplying weapons for the army. Yet her husband was family to Moses father-in-law too. Heber, Jael's husband was a good businessman as he supplied the tools of war to the Canaanites. Jael offered Sisera a place to flee to, respite, something to drink and even a place to sleep. Was Sisera just tired or was he afraid and just wanting to hide? He had a drink of milk and then fell asleep.

This was when Jael killed Sisera. We don't fully know her motive but she was celebrated as a national heroine. Jael had used her wits about her; she did what she believed was right. Her choice was clearly opposite to her husband's stance, but she acted according to her own convictions. Her choice also altered the course of history for both the Canaanites and the Israelites. And of course Deborah's prophesy was fulfilled.

Bravery? Courage? Murder? Why do we consider both Deborah and Jael brave. What calls us to hear their stories and respond with a great Yes They did it? What might we learn from Deborah? Deborah received prophesies from God. And from this, we learn that she did not keep the plan to bring down the Canaanites to herself. She was a respected leader of the time. She heard God's message and was obedient. She listened to God's call and called Barak to gather the troops.

We must listen to God; if God is telling us to do something or go somewhere, despite our fears, we must listen. He has plans that we cannot begin to understand but the hearts and lives of other people may be changed if we obey. This is most important.

The old saying, "God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called." Applies here. No doubt this walking onto the battlefield was not what Deborah thought she would ever do. She was probably terrified. But with the rain pouring down; the Canaanite army became stuck in the mud. This is when Deborah was courageous and encouraged the troops as they fought on

the battlefield. Deborah was courageous and brave to act out of her comfort zone. Yet she obeyed God was courageous and held onto her faith. She was courageous for God's glory.

Deborah was strong in her faith. She never questioned her faith as she believed God spoke to her; she also knew that Sisera would be killed but not sure by whom. She stood true to her call and she looked on to the army who fulfilled their calling. She did not know what was going to happen, but she remembered that God was with her.

Jael was brave- she killed a man with a hammer and tent peg. She must have known who he was went he sought refuge. He was given milk to calm him down and this caused him to become sleepy. She kept her focus on what was going on outside her tent yet did what she believed was right—killing the leader of the enemy army. And she did this in opposition to her husband's desire for their business was in providing weaponry for the Canaanite army. Yet the Israelites were now victorious.

Bravery is something we often wonder about for ourselves. Would you be able to do something that was out of character for you? Would you stand up for your faith and do so knowing that others' dependent upon you? Just how courageous are you? From where does your courage come? What about your faith? Deborah's prophesy led the army to face a better equipped troop. Yet she did not flee. She believed God was with them. She showed bravery in leadership and the ability to think under pressure as a leader.

When we reflect upon being brave we remember the story of Jesus calling to Peter to walk to him on the water. Peter got out of the boat and he started walking on the water towards Jesus. But when the wind became strong around him, he became frightened and began to sink. He even cried out "Save me!" Peter couldn't swim but immediately Jesus becomes his life guard and catches him. Jesus says to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Those in the boat worshiped Jesus saying, "Truly you are the Son of God!"

Peter demonstrated his bravery as he walked a few steps on the water. He was able to do this because his focus was on Jesus. Deborah was a prophet and she was brave as he told

Barak to assemble the army to go into battle against Sisera. Her focus was on God because he had told her what to do.

Jael was brave and probably did not know or realize her abilities to take down the army general. Her focus was on helping those who were in need-the Israelites.

As long as Peter focused on Jesus as was well but when he became aware of the wind—he began to sink. He needed Jesus to save him as the water was deep and he could not swim. We too experience this as well. When we first commit to Christ, our focus and excitement is great. We serve Christ with earnest and energy and whatever we can do. We enter into covenants and promises of service and our purpose is clear: to hear God's purpose and do what we are called to do. These promises are heard by others in churches and what is shared in relationship with the community of believers becomes our mission focus. But, when we shift our mission and move away from Christ, when we take our focus away from Jesus and are distracted, we lose our footing and begin to sink.

We need to be brave and continue to be brave like Deborah and Jael, to do what God leads us to do and then move to what is beyond our regular tasks to benefit others. This does not necessarily mean killing someone. But we must put who we are, our faith focus on Jesus all into perspective and do what God calls us to do. With courage, and encouragement from the Spirit, we will serve Christ and live out our faith. We are Christ's disciples and we are called to serve, to be brave, to be courageous and to stand up in faith.

Let us pray.

God of grace and love, we thank you for Deborah and Jael's YAAEL's life stories. We praise you for their bravery, and how they have shown us to be faithful believers in you in all circumstances that we might face- when we struggle in pain and hurting, when sickness or when we are questioned about our faith and when we need to support and encourage others. Hear us O God as we are renewed in faith for even in this moment you continue to call us to do what is needed as we share in Christ's mission today. Hear our prayers we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.