

2024 08 25 – Deborah

Scripture: Judges 4:1-16 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

So how many of you watched some of the Democratic National Convention this week? It was kind of fun to watch, wasn't it? It was an event jam-packed with dynamic speakers and famous entertainers. It was also an opportunity to learn a little more about Kamala Harris, her background and her policies, as she moves forward in her campaign for the presidency of The United States of America.

Events like this one are not only entertaining; they also help us explore what it means to be a leader in today's society. As we watch this election campaign south of the border and anticipate our own upcoming elections here in Swift Current and in our province, maybe we should be asking ourselves, "What are some of the qualities that we respect and admire in people who take leadership positions?" What are we looking for in a leader? Let's take a moment and name a few of those qualities. (wait for answers: honesty, courage, compassion, strength, humility, desire for justice for all).

Today's scripture is also about leadership. As we near the end of our summer series on Women of the Hebrew Scriptures, we are turning to the story of Deborah. Deborah was a prophet who lived over 3000 years ago. She lived in a time when the Israelites were being oppressed by Jabin, a Canaanite king. Her story and others in the Book of Judges illustrate the violence and unrest that was part of life in Canaan following the Israelites' colonization of their promised land.

Deborah was obviously someone who was well-respected for her wisdom and insight. The Israelite people who lived near would come to her place under the palm tree in the hill country of Ephraim and ask her to make judgements on various questions and disputes.

She was also known as a prophet, a messenger for God. But when she summoned Barak, a military leader of the Israelites, he accepted her prophesy with some reluctance. Using God's name, she asked Barak to bring 10,000 Israelites to fight the troops of Sisera, the commander of Nabin's army. No doubt some of Barak's reluctance came from the fact that Sisera had nine hundred chariots of iron and the Israelites were not as well equipped.

Barak's compromise was that he would go and fight only if Deborah came too. I love her reply. She said, "Very well, I will go with you, but then you won't have the honor of victory from this battle—for YHWH will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman!" And that is what happened. They fought and won just as Deborah prophesied. All of Sisera's troops were killed. If we read a little further, we find that, despite his attempt to flee, Sisera also died that day at the hands of a different woman. But that is another story.

So here we have Deborah: a prophet, a judge and a military leader. Quite an appropriate story considering that just one month ago, General Jennie Carignan (keh' rig nuhn) became Canada's Chief of Defense. She became the first woman to have this position in any of the G20 countries. If Kamala Harris wins the election this fall, then she will become not only the President but also the

Commander in Chief of the military of the United States. You could say, it's only taken us 3000 years to live out the legacy of the prophet Deborah.

But no matter what your gender may be, obtaining this type of leadership role, this type of power is only the first step. Once you have been given this power, then you have to figure out what you are going to do with it. What type of leader are you going to be? What is going to happen now that you have this power?

The song that we listened to this morning, *What Happens When a Woman Takes Power* is asking this very question. It is a very relevant song for this time and it is everywhere on social media. It is on TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and the list goes on. It has been performed by women's groups of all ages, mixed choruses and of course the original trio who created it: Artemisia. In this song, the question is asked over and over and then, in the middle, it is answered with the following words:

We rise above
We lead with love
We have won
We are one
We've just begun.

Now, of course, the power that these women are singing about is not just political power or military power. It is also having power over our own bodies, in our relationships, in our families, in our workplaces, and in our communities. It is with this power that women will rise above and lead with love. I'm thinking the phrase "we rise above" is probably about forgiveness, letting go, taking the higher road, but the next line is the one that is most powerful for me. "We lead with love."

And it doesn't matter if we are women or men or non-binary. As Christians, we are called to live and to lead with the power of the Essence of Love, the Holy Mystery, the Ground of our Being. We are called to live and to lead with compassion, with kindness, with truth, with courage, with justice and all those other qualities that you named at the beginning of this sermon.

If we think about it Deborah's prophesy was one of violence. But was fighting really the only solution for the Israelites? Did YHWH really tell Deborah that Barak had to fight Sisera's troops? I know the Israelites believed in a God of violence and retribution. But that's not the God that I believe in. I believe in the God that the prophet Micah talks about when he says,

Listen here mortal:
God has already made abundantly clear
What 'good' is, and what YHWH needs from you:
 simply do justice,
 love kindness,
 and humbly walk with your God. (Micah 6:8)

Justice, kindness and humility as we walk with the God of love. Leading with love. I believe that is what we are called to do. I believe that is what we should be looking for in our leaders. We need to be voting for people who are focussed on justice for all and compassion for the marginalized and the oppressed.

People who have the humility to realize when they don't have all the answers.

People who have the wisdom and the courage to ask for help, help from their God, help from their friends, help from trusted knowledge experts.

Gender doesn't matter. What matters is what motivates our leaders, what they care about and what changes they are trying to make.

This fall, as we move into this election season, I pray that as we vote we will keep Deborah's story and Micah's words in our hearts and in our minds.

May it be so. Amen.