



**SOUTHWESTERN  
PENNSYLVANIA  
SYNOD** EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN  
CHURCH IN AMERICA

# SUMMER SERMON SERIES

SERVICE 1 of 3 | **DEBORAH: THE COLLABORATIVE LEADER**

## **SERMON TRANSCRIPT**

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Judges 4: 1-10

Grace to you and Peace, my sisters and brothers, from God our Father, Christ our Brother, and the Holy Spirit who gives us hope.

Grace to you and Peace, Amen.

She was a woman of fire.

She was a prophet, bringing the word of God to individuals

She was a judge, solving legal disputes between people, and directing military campaigns for Israel.

People would come to Deborah in the sanctuary under the palm, seeking her wisdom, her care and her guidance for the descendants of Israel in the time of the Judges.

The Book of Judges is a collection of stories about heroes from the early days of Israel's history. From the time of Joshua up to the beginning of the story of Samuel, the judge and prophet who would anoint King Saul and later King David.

The stories of the judges were told in families and clans, in the villages and in the towns, at rest areas on the roadside for thousands of years. Deborah's song, found in Chapter 5 is one of the oldest poems in our Scriptural tradition.

The story of Deborah is one of many women in the Bible we do not hear on a regular basis. However their leadership, wisdom and witness have inspired many for thousands of years; and so when 50 years ago, as our predecessor Lutheran bodies moved to open the roster of ordained ministry to women, they looked to examples like Deborah and others to guide their decision. As we celebrate Rev. Platz's historic ordination this year, I encourage you to discover the stories of the many women who make up our spiritual ancestry.

2020 is a historic year. In addition to 50 years of ordained Lutheran women, we commemorate 100 years since the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment which guaranteed white women's constitutional right to vote. However, it wasn't until the 1965 Voting Rights Amendment that Women of Color were afforded that same constitutional protection.

As these past months have reminded us, we have not come nearly as far as many of us naively thought. This time of the Pandemic has called into sharp distinction the still very present evils of racism, classism, privilege, implicit bias, poverty and hate that have been growing in our country.

And in these times, when the light has been shown on places that we preferred to keep shadowed, where images show us photos we would have rather ignored, where we hear voices we have long dismissed as unimportant... we find ourselves in need of God's presence now more than ever.

We too cry out, as the Israelites did, to the Lord for help.

We too, seek guidance for the path ahead in our broken societal systems.

We want a leader, an arbiter, a guide and judge to grant us wisdom. And this is where Deborah's story is so powerful.

For in a culture, where we often look to singular human heroes, Deborah's leadership offers another way: one of interdependence, collaboration and shared responsibility in order to reach a common goal.

God's word came to Deborah, yes, but she then brings Barak to the table. His impassioned speech shows us that he too believes in collaboration and is not threatened by her leadership. God then takes the opportunity to expand the mission to include another if you keep reading in Chapter 4.

Deborah and Barak would not have known Jael, a non-Israelite and wife of an iron-worker, who ends up playing a vital role in the victory that God and Israel wins.

Isn't it wonderful to think of the ways God works to create networks of different and often unlikely human agents in order to accomplish God's work in the world? The scriptures remind us to trust that God is at work in multiple ways, so many of which we are never fully aware of in the present, to guide individuals and communities to God's larger vision for the world.

Change is accomplished when we work together, lead together, trust the many gifts that have been given to each of us, to affect justice in our world.

Now, to be clear, the military campaigns of Joshua, the Judges and the kings of Israel do not always seem to be ones of justice. Sadly, the human condition across history is often marked by violence and war - waged in God's name.

The Bible does not ignore or shrink from this tragic truth. In fact, the song of Deborah names the grief of Sisera's mother as she anxiously waits for him to return home.

The God of Scripture enters into these messy and tragic conflicts and battles.

The most powerful stories we tell are those of God fighting on the side of the oppressed who cry out to God.

God bringing people from slavery to freedom.

God entering into human history with such great love and a message of freedom and justice so radical, that he was killed by the political powers of the time.

But Jesus' message of love, peace, and radical hospitality and invitation to the most unlikely of people continues the arc of God's story that had been there from the beginning.

The people of this world have always struggled to live into the created hope of God. But God has not abandoned us.

God continues to send leaders – human beings, young and old to bring witness to the expansive understanding of God's creation.

But we have a lot of repenting, renewing and revitalizing to work through.

Because it was only 100 years ago that white women were legally seen as fully human.

And 55 years ago men and women of African Descent as fully human.

And 50 years ago white women as called and ordained leaders of our church.

40 years ago, women of color as called and ordained leaders of our church.

10 years ago, barriers to ordination removed for those who love others of the same gender.

This year, 2020, is a Kairos moment, a God moment – showing us the path to wholeness, health and renewal for all of God's beloved people.

God is reminding us again, as God has before:

That all of creation is beloved, valued and needed for the work God calls us to do.

And we will work together.

Our leaders will work together to bring about justice, peace and health.  
Our people will live together in hope and harmony.  
Our children will know a world where they are loved because of their diversity  
rather than in spite of it.

We are God's people.  
Called in our baptism to encourage the community of faith and to share the  
good news of Jesus's message of love to the world.

Loving God, Loving our neighbor, Loving the world,  
We understand how interconnected and interdependent we are as a family of  
God.

We are the Body of Christ  
We are God's people.  
Called by the Holy Spirit and sent for the sake of the world.

Amen.