

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

10th October 2021

JUDGES 4:4-7

DEBORAH: EMBRACING GOD'S CALL

Our leaders, whether they are politicians or bosses, elected or appointed, team coaches, businesses owners, teachers, or even parents, don't always have an easy time of it, do they? In fact, we can sometimes wonder why anyone would want to be a leader, even though we all hold this role at times in different ways. As much as leaders can believe in what they are doing, and be honestly trying to do the right thing by everyone, they are never going to keep us all happy.

I feel for our political leaders at the moment, at all levels. What a time to come into elected leadership. And we visibly see the strain on them, don't we? Just take our premiers for example; during 'normal' times they are making plans for where roads and hospitals need to be built in ten years' time, or coming up with long term plans for the education or health systems. Right now, on a daily basis they are making decisions about lockdowns, border closures, restrictions, and economic assistance. They daily have to make decisions which affect people's health and lives, their families, and their livelihoods. These are decisions in which they are all, on the basis of their own beliefs, trying to do what is best for everyone. And, not surprisingly because these decisions affect us in such major ways, there are always a number of us who aren't happy about what is decided. Whether you are a leader as a parent, or a teacher, an employer, in church or some other group, or an elected politician, a part of leadership means that at times you will make decisions which you truly believe are right, but which not everyone will agree with you about.

So why do they do it? Why do each one of us do it in some way? That's a question with many different answers. But we do know that to be a leader, to both make strong decisions and to stand by them, you need to have both courage and conviction; to have a belief in what you are doing and why you are doing it.

We see this kind of courage which comes from belief and conviction in many leaders in the Bible. We know that many of them aren't perfect, but nonetheless because of their faith God works

through them to accomplish amazing things. The leader we are looking at today, Deborah, is a great example of someone who had the courage of her convictions, and who embraced the call to serve God's people which He had given her.

Deborah's story is found in the book of Judges, chapters 4 and 5. We are told that the previous leader of Israel, Ehud, had died, and the Israelites had started to disobey God. As always, this led to trouble for them, which this time meant they were taken over by their enemies the Canaanites. For 20 years the Canaanites ruled over the Israelites and made life hard for them, until finally they called out to God for help.

Now we get introduced to Deborah, who was a prophet and a leader of Israel at this time. Deborah is one of only five female prophets mentioned in the Old Testament, and the only female leader who is spoken about in the Old Testament. We don't know how she came to these positions, or anything else about her except that she is also the wife of Lappidoth. We can only think that her history and how she got to the position she is in are not important, but how she acted in that position and what God is teaching us through her actions are what is important.

As a prophet Deborah has received a message from God, who has decided to once again respond to His people's plea for help despite the fact they keep turning away from Him. She calls a man named Barak, and tells him of God's plan for Barak to lead an army which will defeat the Canaanites. While Barak does follow Deborah's instructions, she is obviously a leader who inspires confidence because Barak asks her to accompany the army. You can read the rest of the story in the rest of Judges 4 and 5, but God does use Deborah, Barak, and a lady named Jael, to free His people and defeat their enemies.

It is a short, and pretty straightforward, account we are given here about Deborah, but it does give us a good teaching about what it means to follow God, to embrace His call. We don't know how Deborah got to the position of a prophet and a leader, but God had obviously put her there for a purpose and a time. If Deborah hadn't taken up that call, if she hadn't received the message from God, passed it on to Barak, and then agreed to accompany the army, nothing would have changed; the Israelites would have stayed under the control of their enemies. With what we know about us as

people and our reactions to the decisions of our leaders, it is very possible that when Barak under Deborah's leadership started gathering an army together some people would have been against it; they would have argued that while things were bad, they would get worse if they started fighting against their oppressors. The Israelite equivalent of 'Don't stir up the hornets nest!' may have been often quoted. But Deborah stayed strong, she stayed true to what she believed God had called her to do, and so through her God was able to save His people.

From the story of Deborah, we learn not just some good lessons about faithful, strong and calm leadership, but we also learn what it means to be a servant of God and His people. You might remember that in the story of Esther, when Esther is faced with a choice which might mean either her death or that her people would be saved, her Uncle Mordechai challenged her with the words; 'It could be that you were made queen for a time like this' (*Esther 4:14*). The same may have been said to Deborah if she had any hesitation in passing God's message on to Barak; 'it could be that you have been made leader for a time like this'.

God has placed us all into positions in which we can serve Him and His people. We carry out these callings every day. Some days it might be in very big and upfront ways which we are very aware of. But many days we embrace God's call and serve Him by serving others in ways that we don't even notice, we do it because of our faith and who God has made us to be. How does it look for you? What situations are you in in your life that God is ready to work through? How can you fill in this sentence: it could be that God has placed you as for a time like this? It could be as a parent, a child, a brother or sister, grandparent, grandchild, employer, employee, citizen, friend, neighbour, a fellow congregation member, a teacher, a patient, a student, and the list goes on and on. There are many ways where each day God is calling us to share His love with others by the things we say and do. It might be through our leadership, or it might be through assistance we give. It might be in the words we say, or even through the smile we give. There are so many ways we can embrace God's call.

Just one little example. At the moment I am going to a physio each week for treatment on tendonitis on my ankle; I feel like a professional athlete saying I have tendonitis, but I know it's more

about getting old. When I first went to this physio and he asked what my job was, he replied that he had never met any sort of minister or pastor before. During my six or so visits to him, while he is causing great pain on my ankle we talk about Covid and what the politicians should be doing, motorbikes, fishing, and our families. He has touched on God stuff a couple of times, and I've just gone with it when he has; I don't need to push it. When I no longer need to see him regularly, I pray that he will have a view of Christians as people who are down to earth, and who he can relate to at some time later. I don't believe that God gave me tendonitis, or that He directly sent me to this physio, but I do believe that in this situation, as in any situation we are in in our lives, God can work through me.

As God's people, each one of us are called to live out our faith in how we embrace our call every day. In the short account of her life, Deborah shows us what it means to have conviction in our belief, and what God does through us when we follow Him. It might be through leadership which is faithful, compassionate and strong, and we all have leadership roles at some time. But it's wider than that; we each have many calls, and ways that God can and does use us in His service. God be with us, guide us, and strengthen us as we each seek to take up our call, to embrace our call, wherever we are, to serve Him each day. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION:

Strong, Compassionate Leadership

- Think about the leadership positions you fulfill in your life. How do you go with them? Do you struggle with them at all? What are the joys in these roles? What are the struggles?
- Think about leaders we have in the Bible, including Deborah. What can you learn from their stories to help you in the leadership roles God has placed you in.
- Pray for the leadership roles you are in. Ask God to continue to work through you. Thank God for the joy they give you, and ask for His help with any struggles or challenges you have.

Embracing Our Call

Like Deborah, we are each in situations in our lives where God is calling us to serve Him by reaching out to others with His love.

- Consider all the different situations you are in in your life.
- How are you serving God already in many of these roles and places?
- How is God calling you serve Him more in some of these roles and places?
- Thank God for the many callings He gives you, and ask Him for the wisdom and courage you need to embrace His call in all of these ways.

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