From Epic poetry we all read such as the Odyssey or Beowulf to the story that Aunt Maria tells every Thanksgiving about how long her labor was with your cousin John, sharing stories has always been

1. A way to spend time getting to know one another
2. Passing on important information
3. And either consciously or unconsciously shares deep sense of who you are and tells the story of who you are much better than you can articulate yourself.

What is a story you’ve told over and over ahead or heard?
Why is it told?
Does it change over time?
Did you remember correctly, or has it gotten more dramatic?

What is it about a story that makes it important to share and pass on, one that transcends time is not only because they convey a story of who wrote them and the moment they were in and the more timeless ones take on new meaning for the people of new generations?

The epic poem that is our text for today immediately flooded me with these questions, what does this complicated poetry have to say to us?

It is impossible to strip away what floods our hearts and minds when coming to scripture. Israel is faced up against an enemy, and we can insert any issue in the past 200 years or the past 2 days and make a battle. Though, battles in the OT, they are never about the battle, they are about God’s faithfulness and the restoration of God’s covenant promise.

It is not lost on me that I, as a woman leader, have the opportunity to stand before you to explore further this scripture that centers on the leadership of a woman named Deborah, a judge whose leadership is filled with bravery and a leadership where it was noted she ruled in an unexpected way. She is not only the only woman Judge, but also is one of the few women leaders mentioned in all of the Bible. Her inclusion is unprecedented, and also, her inclusion is precedent setting.
Last week, John led us through Judges 4 and today Jason read chapter 5, a retelling of what happened in an epic poem of adventure and bloodshed. That we get 2 chapters is a lot of real estate for this unexpected win and unlikely heroes and heroines.

Whatever the reason, because Deborah’s story is told, it widens the margins of our understanding of God’s faithfulness.

1. What we know about the impact of Deborah.

I’m not sure if a better comparison might be former Supreme court Judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg or the young Nobel peace Prize winner who has had her life threatened many times Malala Yousafzai. But Deborah led the people of Israel at that time as a judge; A prophet, a warrior, & politician. We read about her famed and unique leadership, but the tale that gets the most description is after she hears the command from God. And she gets up and goes.

…Deborah heard from the Lord, to assemble a large army to go up against the Canaanites who had been oppressing the Israelites for over 20 years. Deborah summons her military commander Barak who will not go without her. Because of his disbelief he will not be the one to whom the honor of victory is given. Deborah summons the other tribes of Israel to come alongside her, to which only 4 of the 12 come, cursing those who are in disbelief of God’s faithfulness.

Up against the Canaanite army led by Sisera, described as 900 iron chariots, Israel has no such strength.

- Have you ever faced something big?
- And felt like the odds were not in your favor?
- Were there things that helped you brave “the battle” before you?
- What kept you going?

Israel goes to fight, desperate for these 20 years of oppression to end. God’s faithfulness proves to be true as rain floods the plain and renders the chariots useless. The prophecy is coming true. When Sisera’s entire army is slaughtered, Sisera flees by foot. In those days the commander killed was the mark that the battle had been won. Sisera goes to an ally camp, Heber the Kenite. But Heber isn’t home.

His wife Jael is.

2. This leads us to something else we know about the impact of Deborah.
Deborah’s story makes it possible for Jael to be mentioned, further widening the margins of our understanding of God’s faithfulness. Herber’s wife Jael does not have the same allegiance because her family is of the line of Moses, an Israelite. She knows how to use her femininity on Sisera. She welcomes the exhausted warrior into her tent, offers him some milk and rest. As he sleeps, she drives a tent peg through his skull and he dies thus solidifying the victory for Israel. Jael does not do what is expected of her. She violates hospitality. She violates her husband’s alliances. She violates gender roles—one of very few women in the Bible to kill anyone at all. And because she chooses to kill a violent oppressor, Israel “grows stronger and stronger” (4:24)

With Deborah we see God’s faithfulness in battles fought on a big battlefield. And in Jael we see God’s faithfulness in the battles fought in the small intimate spaces of our lives.

We especially need stories of God bursting in there!

I read about the impact of the inclusion of Jael in an article written by Sarah Jobe a few years ago by the Christian Century. Sarah was a chaplain at the time, leading the topic of Judges 4 & 5 at a bible study.

The bible study was conducted in a women’s prison, of whom all of the attendees were charged with first and second-degree murder of an alleged abuser. It is not a surprise that the women connected with Jael. It shares a narrative the women were familiar with, he was in her tent, a weapon was used, she killed him. Jael’s crime meets all the conditions of their crime, the only difference being, she was praised for it.

They needed to hear this story
Because it changed their story.

To be clear, neither Jael nor the women in the prison’s stories changed.
How they shared their stories were.

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If you are sitting here uncomfortable with how much violence and bloodshed is in this account, you are not alone. Especially knowing that this story is one of many disturbing, unsettling, and unfulfilling accounts. And that’s the point. The stories are meant to serve as a warning. Israel’s descent into self-destruction is a result of turning away from a God who loves them and saved them out of slavery in Egypt, and now Israel needs to be delivered again from
themselves. There is value to the tragedy. It’s a sobering explanation of the human condition, and ultimately it points out the need for God’s grace to send a Messiah who will rescue God’s people.

3. The inclusion of Deborah increases our awareness of God’s presence
the recognition of our need for Jesus

-The inclusion of Deborah increases our awareness of God’s presence and the recognition of our need for Jesus. -Deborah was a judge for a time over Israel;
Jesus is the judge of Israel and all people.
-Deborah led Israel into a military victory to free them from oppression under the Canaanites.
She passed on to them the word of the LORD, revealing the LORD’s will for the people of Israel.
-In Jesus Christ, we not only receive what God has to say AND we receive God.

The peace and rest that Jesus leads his people into isn’t a temporary one, contingent upon our behaving well.

It leans on the importance of human beings’ actions.
The characters are not simply watching God act (as in the parting of the Red sea). Despite the fact that the situation seems hopeless.

God keeps us in perfect peace,
God teaches us rest in God, and heals us and our communities and societies from the ways sin has caused brokenness.

Epic songs are already being written rooted in faith

Minutes after the decision of the Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade.
“‘It’s okay to cry
To feel absolute rage, to be disappointed
And frustrated
It’s okay
We’ll get to work soon
But don’t let them
Take away your humanity
Don’t let them break your soul.” -Austin Channing Brown