

Good morning. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Our reading is Judges 5:28-30. Listen for the wisdom and word of the Lord.

Out of the window she peered, the mother of Sisera gazed through the lattice: “Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots?” Her wisest ladies make answer, indeed, she answers the question herself: “Are they not finding and dividing the spoil?—a girl or two for every man; spoil of dyed stuffs for Sisera, spoil of dyed stuffs embroidered, two pieces of dyed work embroidered for my neck as spoil?”

For the word of God in Scripture, for the word of God within us, for the word of God among us, **thanks be to God.**

It's that time of year again. School is back in session. The mornings are starting to get cooler. Grocery stores are selling pumpkins. Costumes line the center isles of places like Walmart. Spirit Halloween stores are magically popping up all over the place. Rivers of pumpkin spice pour out of our local Starbucks. High school football games occur almost every weekend. In the northeast, where I am from, scarves and sweaters are being dusted off after sitting in plastic totes for a year or so. Fall is in full bloom.

It's that time of year again. Campaign ads flood our televisions. Political pundits give their commentary on our airwaves. Yard signs declaring a household's allegiance can be seen for miles and miles. Our collective

rhetoric is getting more and more sharp. Things and words we normally would not say around our family and friends and neighbors are quickly applied to the candidate we dislike. Those on the other side of the political fence are likewise degraded. Suddenly the beautiful theology we hold so dear—that each and every person is loved and redeemed by God—is forgotten until the ballot box closes. It's that time of year again, a time that comes every four years: the election season.

Now, this is certainly not a call to drop values and beliefs for the sake of a false unity. After all, Jesus tells us to love our enemies, implying that we do have ideologies we oppose. The New Testament over and over again empowers us to speak truth to power, as do the prophets

of the Hebrew Bible. And not just Jesus, but this morning's text makes a similar claim.

This section is contained in a much larger poem called the Song of Deborah, which was sung to celebrate the victory gained over King Jabin of Canaan. Jabin sought to conquer and colonize Israel after Ehud the Judge had perished. While the text claims that Jabin was able to attack Israel because of Israel's unfaithfulness towards God, the sense I get is that Israel lacked a centralizing figure and was therefore weakened. No matter the case, Jabin presses onward and is represented on the battlefield by his top general Sisera. Sisera was oppressive and cruel, and in Israel's distress God stirred up Deborah to save her people. She called upon Barak to

lead Israel's counter-force and the two of them met Sisera on the battlefield. Sisera ends up fleeing to Jael's tent, and Jael ends the life of Sisera by driving a tent peg into his temple. With Sisera defeated, Jabin's rule over Israel was broken. They were free.

Deborah sings this song to memorialize Israel's triumphant victory that secured their freedom. God is characterized as the great warrior who worked through God's people to throw off the yoke of an oppressive empire. What is interesting about the song is that it includes speculative material about Sisera's mother, material that does not appear anywhere else in the book of Judges. What is sung about her does not cast her in a good light. She not only praises but approves of Sisera's

slaughter of the Israelites, the theft of their stuff, and the kidnapping of their daughters. She is even hopeful that Sisera would do these things. It goes without saying that the outcome she desires is outright violent, abhorrent, and ought to be condemned. And yet, in the midst of all this, this text teaches us some important lessons for when we do engage our enemies.

The first thing this text teaches us is that it is of Christian character to tell the truth. The whole truth. The ugly truth. The painful truth. Truth about others—and ourselves. While we most certainly would not go as far as Sisera's mother, how many of us have gleefully remarked about a candidate's age or weight? What about a candidate's mental health and cognitive function? How

many of us scrutinized a candidate for what they wore?  
Or, even worse, how many of us have questioned the  
Christian faith of the nominee we do not like? I will be  
the first to say that I am guilty of these things. What  
Sisera's mother does is hold up a mirror and ask us to  
examine ourselves before casting judgment on her.

And yet this text does allow us to take a stand, to  
speak up when our values of love and justice—values  
taught by Jesus Christ and passed through the ages to  
us—are contradicted by those who wield power. Deborah,  
the prophet and judge of powerless Israel, is not  
condemned by the author of Judges nor by God by  
speaking the truth. Deborah stands in a long line of  
truth-tellers, a line that extends past her to the prophets to

Jesus Christ and to the modern day. This line includes figures like Martin Luther King, Jr., Sojourner Truth, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Rosa Parks, and Fannie Lou Hamer. This line includes Allan Boesak, a South African Dutch Reformed minister and anti-apartheid activist who worked shoulder-to-shoulder with Nelson Mandela. Boesak spoke truth to power to his own Reformed tradition by reminding it of God's love for everyone, a reminder written down as the Belhar Confession.

The first thing this text teaches us is to tell the truth, but this is not the only lesson gleaned. The second thing to be learned is that those people we oppose, those we regard as our enemies, are still human beings. Watch



carefully what this text says about Sisera's mother. She is anxious. Her eyes look through the window and are frantically looking for her son. She is worried her son is dead—and not just worried, but knows her son is dead. She knows the reason why he is delayed is that her son's corpse lies defeated somewhere out there. She is grieving. She is mourning. She is a mother whose son is dead, and the text does not criticize her for this.

Hebrew Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann says that Sisera's mother invites us to see the enemy a second time<sup>1</sup>. Sisera's mother is indeed the enemy woman, but she is more than that. She is a human being who is as loved by God as Deborah is loved. She is loved like you

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<sup>1</sup> Brueggemann, Walter. "On Seeing the Enemy a Second Time" in *The Church Anew*. Accessed 28 September 2024: <https://churchanew.org/brueggemann/on-seeing-the-enemy-a-second-time>.

or me are loved. She is created in the image of God like everything else in all of creation. Yes, she is caught up in oppressive beliefs. Yes, her beliefs stand contrary to the love and justice revealed by Jesus Christ. Yes, she is not above the prophetic critique of speaking truth to power. But in all of that, we need to remember that she is a human being who deserves the dignity awarded to all human beings. The text does not flatten her into a caricature. In fact, the text goes out of its way to make her complex. She is also a grieving mother who desperately wants her son home \*and\* she upholds oppression.

This is a lesson that all of us—perhaps me, more than most—need to hear this election season. You are allowed to dislike any candidate, their behavior, their politics. No

one is above truth-telling. But as we tell the truth, as we say the thing that we feel needs to be said, as we talk with people we ideologically disagree with, remember that the other person is also a human being. That person is also made in the image of God, bought and redeemed by Christ's most holy Passion, sanctified and sustained by the Holy Spirit. God loves them as much as God loves you.

Amen.