

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

November 16, 2014

Proper 28A/Ordinary 33A/Pentecost +23

The readings this week:

- Judges 4:1-7 ◦ Psalm 123
- 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 ◦ Matthew 25:14-30

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Sitting

Deborah: Judge. Prophetess. Wife or "spirited woman," depending on how you translate the Hebrew. Powerful woman who advised generals and led troops into battle. Creative woman who composed songs of victory. Wise woman who "sat."

As a seminarian, I was impressed by Deborah's many roles and responsibilities. She was a leader of men when women could only be wives, sisters and mothers. A judge, when a woman's testimony never counted as much as a man's. On the front line, when a woman's place was in the home.

I am still impressed by all that. But 20-plus years later, as a minister with a considerable number of roles myself, I'm equally impressed with the phrase; "She used to sit." I think it's the most radical thing she did, especially as a leader. We leaders organize, plan, execute, strategize. We lead. We don't sit.

My mother used to sit. As a widowed parent to four children, a science teacher and a volunteer for church and 4-H, she had little time to sit. Yet every morning before we got up, she'd sit in her chair in the living room, a cup of coffee in one hand, the Bible in the other. If the afternoon permitted it, she did the same, although with a cup of tea or a can of beer (if the day had been really long), and with the newspaper instead of the Bible. We kids knew the time was sacred and did not disturb her with "What's for dinner?"

I think we knew that sitting made all the other activity possible. It didn't solve all our problems as a family, of which there were many, or guarantee order out of chaos. But sitting offered my mother a chance to catch her breath, to remember life was more than the task at hand, and to tap into some sense of peace in the midst of the maelstrom.

I suspect that was true for Deborah as well. Leaders need wisdom and courage and can't find those qualities if they're always out front leading the charge. Sometimes they need just to sit.

Sitting is usually the last thing I want to do, or that I think others expect me to do. I increasingly yearn to sit in silence. There are even times when I wonder if I have any

word to offer. But then I remember Deborah under her palm tree and my mother with her morning coffee. And I remember Joan Forsberg.

Joan, a UCC minister, was dean of students at Yale Divinity School during the '70s and '80s, a time when women were finding their voices and leadership in the church in new ways. As a mentor and role model for women students, Joan was a top candidate to speak at the first women's reunion at YDS. As Women's Center coordinator, it was my job to talk her into it.

We met over supper at a neighborhood café. After I affirmed the importance of her preaching, however, Joan told me that she couldn't accept the invitation. "You can't preach if you don't have something to say," she said. "You have to have some word to offer. Right now, I don't have one"

"I feel silenced," she explained. "Maybe it's simple weariness. Maybe it's feeling overwhelmed by all the demands. There have been too many changes -- in my life, this world, everywhere. The old answers don't fit any longer, and I don't have the words for new ones. It almost feels like the words have been taken away. I need to sit in the silence. I'm sorry."

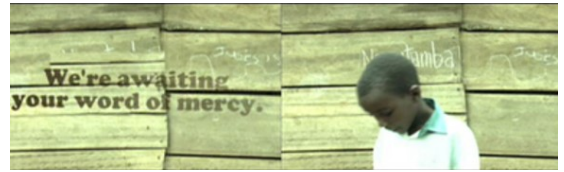
We sat, I stirring my coffee, she dipping her tea bag. Part of me couldn't believe what I had heard. How could this strong, competent role model feel silenced? Another part of me knew she was telling the truth, not just for herself but the rest of us. "Maybe you could talk about that," I ventured. "About not having the answers or even a good word, not acting or preaching or leading, but just sitting." "Every woman of your generation would know what you were talking about," I added, "and most of the men too. And those of us still in school need to hear that word, too, because sooner or later, we'll find ourselves sitting in that silence."

Joan did decide to preach at the reunion. She talked about being silenced by one's life and having to sit without words or answers. She urged us not to fight the silence nor to castigate ourselves for it, but to let it teach us what it would. I don't know how old Deborah was when she was a judge in Israel, but I'm now the age my mother was when I was a teenager and the age Joan was when we shared dinner that night. The longer I stay in ministry, the more grateful I am for the example of powerfully wise women who lead, counsel, advise, preach -- and sometimes just sit in silence.

[Talitha Arnold](#)



Reflecting on the Word



___ 1st Reading: [Judges 4:1-7](#)

There are some notable depictions of prophetesses' in scripture (Miriam, sister of Moses in Exodus 15:20; and Huldah, who authenticated the rediscovery of Torah in 2 Kings 22: 14-20, Joel 2:28 and Acts 21: 8-9), Deborah is unique in that she is the only female judge noted in scripture. Trusting in the Lord for deliverance is an important theme of scripture. Is all of our faith being placed in Jesus, or are we guilty of portioning out to some false gods? Can we look past gender when we receive God's Word? Can we think of ways to increase our faith in Jesus instead of spending time stockpiling physical resources? [Sermons that Work](#)

___ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 123](#)

The psalmist is not angry, but is calling for help, for relief. Scorn and contempt has been laid upon the people, and they are either incapable or unwilling to fight against it alone. They turn to the Lord with confidence that they will receive mercy. An important dimension of mercy, (מִחֶנֶץ Isaiah 49:15), is that it can be understood as the tender love a mother has for her children. The psalmist's wish is for the Lord to show motherly care for the people. If you feel that there is no place to turn, no one to help, will you turn to the Lord for mercy? In fact, will you turn to the Lord first? Consider the innocent of the world, those suffering oppression, hunger, disease, those living in war-torn regions, those who have been kidnapped. Can you pray to the Lord for mercy for them? [Sermons that Work](#)

Risk

To laugh, is to risk playing the fool.
To weep, is to risk appearing sentimental.
To reach out to another, is to risk involvement.
To expose feelings, is to risk exposing our true selves.
To put your ideas, your dreams, before the crowd is to risk loss.
To love, is to risk not being loved in return.
To live, is to risk dying.
To hope, is to risk despair.
To try at all, is to risk failure.

But risks must be taken,
Because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.
The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing,
is nothing.
They may avoid suffering and sorrow, but they simply
cannot learn, change, feel, grow, love, live...
Chained by their attitudes they are slaves.
ONLY THE PERSON WHO RISKS IS FREE.

[By Joseph P. Lawler](#)

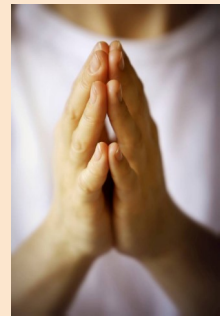
Praying Toward Sunday

a Call to Prayer based upon Matthew 25:14-30

we have talent
precious metal
protected, hoarded.

we have talent
symbolic worth
invested, growing

we have talent
opportunity unfolding
sharing, giving



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___ 3rd Reading: [1 Thessalonians 5:1-11](#)

Paul is exhorting the church to be vigilant. In using "day of the Lord," he is invoking code from Old Testament that was well-understood as "judgment day." He describes it as sudden destruction (v. 3). He calls on the church to be ready – awake and sober (v. 6) – and to use the "weapons" that they have been given: faith, love and hope (v. 8). Most importantly, though, Paul wants them to know that those with faith in Jesus will not receive wrath, but salvation. Finally, note that Paul encourages community. We are not to look to our own futures to the exclusion of others. Part of our calling is to "encourage one another and build each other up" (v. 11) Do you think that the scenario of destruction that Paul paints is real or symbolic? Either way, are you prepared? What do you think of the armor Paul describes: breastplate of faith and love; helmet of the hope of salvation? Can you relate this to the passage above from Judges? How can we build each other up? [Sermons that Work](#)

___ 4th Reading: [Matthew 25:14-30](#)

Think of the talents/gifts with which God has entrusted you. They could be health, physical or mental acumen, friends, family, prayer, the sacraments. Are you using/ investing them to your fullest ability? Can you see them as not being yours, but being entrusted to you by God? Do you view your relationship with God as one of trust and gratitude for the blessings you enjoy, leading you to use them for God's glory, or do you so fear God that you feel mistrustful and perhaps accuse god of being the source of injustice? [Sermons that Work](#)