

So, for the big reveal...How do you like my cape?! Pretty snazzy, right? The "S" stands for STROM, my last name. I don't know why they think it is for Superman.

Heroes don't just belong in comic books and blockbuster movies, in the Marvel or DC universes. Thankfully, we have them in real life too. Before they showed up on the BIG screen they showed up BIG in the Bible.

The Bible is full of stories of normal, everyday people who gave of themselves, had faith...acted on their faith and trusted God when things got tough. People who acted, trusting God when it wasn't all that clear how things would turn out.

Heroes...people we can look up to in life. We all need heroes.

In July, we will be focusing on Heroes of the Faith. Looking at four women in Scripture who showed courage, strength, resilience, and leadership in their lives and in their communities.

Their readiness to listen to God's voice and act on it, inspires us to do the same. They did hard things trusting God would help them. And God did. We have their stories in scripture to teach us to do the same thing, teaching US how to be heroes of the faith.

Speaking of hard things. Moving, downsizing and packing up, ending well with my two lovely churches...that was the most difficult thing I have done in a long time. Incredibly difficult, which surprised me because I have moved many times in my life.

In fact, I used to live in Buffalo from 2002 to 2009 and I lived in four different places in those seven years! I LOVED it. But this last move, not so much.

But God helped me. I had my own Deborah who came to my rescue. (And our Debbie has come to my rescue many times these past two weeks too.) My Deb, is a fellow pastor in the UMC and she pastors at Wilmar UMC. She helped me out. But I wasn't open to her help at first.

I just didn't want people seeing my stuff, felt overwhelmed and didn't know how I might equip another person to help. I felt vulnerable and awkward. But Deb showed resilience, she didn't give up on me. She planted the seed to come help and watered it by affirming that she wasn't just saying it...she did want to help.

God added sunshine of "I need more energy!" and "Let's be wise about this, she IS offering to help!"

So, those seeds that were planted, watered and given sunshine...they grew and blossomed. I was able to receive her help. And I am so glad I did!

Again, your prayers also helped me tremendously. God sent more help! Thank you! Your prayers sustained me many times when I just wanted to quit. The last few boxes were not labeled or carefully packed with paper. I couldn't handle making one more decision, decision fatigue.

Looking back, so GRATEFUL for how God sent people to help me do something that was beyond my ability to do by myself. At times I would wonder, **"Why go through all this CHANGE?!"**

And the response that kept rising in my spirit, **"We embrace change when it advances the gospel. We do hard things SO THAT others may know Jesus, grow in Jesus, live for Jesus."**

Which kind of begs the question, makes me curious...**when was the last time Buffalo United Methodist faced something bigger than you knew how to handle? When was there a need that pulled us together and God helped us find answers? What was the need? How did God respond to your faith and prayers and efforts?**

I know that the SPRC is in the process of planning some Greet and Meets with the pastor. Wonderful opportunities for us to get to know each other better. I look forward to hearing more of your history. I plan to ask this question again. **When did we face a difficulty that required us to pull together, lean into God and move forward trusting God even when we didn't know what the outcome would be?**

When we face difficult times, it can be helpful to remember how God worked not only in our lives but also how God worked in lives of people in Scripture.

We just heard from Sheri as she read from Judges chapter 5. To that, we need a little more context to help us understand Deborah's story. Hang on to your hats or capes. This is fun!

First, being in the book of Judges, we need to remember what is happening in Israel during this time. The people of God were going through a cycle of sorts, that they repeated over and over.

The people of God would wonder away from following God and get into great distress. In pain, the Israelites would cry out to God for help. God would hear their prayers and send a judge to rescue them. They would be rescued and praise God ushering in a season of peace.

But when their judge, or hero died, the Israelites would wander away from God again. And this predictable cycle would begin all over again.

It's why the book is called Judges. God sent judge after judge to help his people. Before Deborah came on the scene, Ehu...their last judge had just died. And again the Israelites, **"did evil in the eyes of the Lord."** Specifically came under the oppression of the Canaanites, under King Jabin. He had a vastly superior army, and ominous description of 900 iron chariots. Jabin's military might generated great fear!

As we begin the Heroes series, we are reminded that God will invite who God will to serve God's greater purposes. Big or small, we need to be listening. Israel was in distress, crying out for help. God responded by calling Deborah. She was listening and responded.

Deborah is also a prophet as well as a judge. According to Deut 18:18, a prophet is one worthy of speaking on behalf of God. Deborah is the only woman prophet mentioned in the Book of Judges and one of five in all of Scripture. And she is a judge. A judge is a charismatic leader, called by God to rise up and lead during times of trouble to arbitrate disputes and serve as a national military leader.

Our passage from chapter 5 of Judges, is a song of rejoicing that Deborah and Barak both sing. The battle has already been won. It is a song inviting us to see where the victories of God are taking place. Here is a summary of three victories given by God.

First, God is present to our needs and struggles. In the larger context, God sees Israel's oppression and suffering, and God, moved by compassion and mercy calls leaders to the rescue.

Barak, is the military commander in Israel, did not want to go into battle without Deborah. Deborah, as prophet and judge, agrees to go to the front line of the war. She is confident, and willing to speak God's truth to Barak.

Together they are our heroes. In chapter four of Judges, they lead the troops to defeat the Canaanite armies and their 900 iron chariots.

Secondly, God works through US, works through our efforts to fight the good fight. Deborah and Barak sing in verse 2, right away celebrating **“when the people willingly offer themselves”** God brings victory through the people. In the Message version, that same line reads God brought victory when, **“the people volunteered with abandon”**. God brings victory through our actions prompted by faith.

And the last victory for us to notice, is it is God who ultimately wins the battle. God calls and sends leaders and motivates and mobilizes the people. But it is God who helps overcome the difficulty and distress. God wins the battle. God partners with humanity with those who are willing to say “yes” to serve God’s purposes.

This is good news for us! God will help us face our difficulties...small and large, personal as well as in the community and congregation. IF we are willing and open. And I believe you are willing and open to God.

So, Deborah plays her part. Barak plays his part. God plays God’s part.

What is your part to play in God’s redeeming work? Maybe you have felt a situation stirring in your heart - it could be a situation in your life, the church or community. Maybe this is God calling YOU to stand up and offer yourself for God’s purpose.

We’ve got something for everyone, opportunities for all ages. If you are new, like me, I saw a group on Thursday playing games in the Fellowship Hall. I was so jealous. I was working on the sermon, like the adult that I am. But, to be honest, I really would have rather been learning how to play Mexican Train.me!

Let the people offer themselves with abandon!

As a denomination, God has called United Methodists over the years to provide Nothing but Nets to the people of Africa, engage in advocating against school segregation, welcome 1,000 people to the youth conference IGNITE, rebuild homes after hurricanes, purchase a plane for missionaries to deliver supplies in the Congo and the list goes on. y one person, and all of these took leaders hearing God’s call to embrace a mission larger than themselves.

As a church, as Buffalo UMC, God has called us to missions and helping meet needs. I was talking to Debbie on Friday and learned just a little about Meals and Missions...tie blankets, helping foster kids, donating to the food shelf and our women’s shelter.

As I was asking myself, **“What are we called to as a community in this town, at this time, with our gifts and graces? With our generous giving hearts?”** Maybe we could sing a song like Deborah and Barak and rejoice. Maybe we could take the whole month of July to bring in food donations to the Buffalo Food Shelf?

For kids, be a hero and bring in your favorite box of breakfast cereal as a donation.

Adults, put on your cape, and buy an extra bag of groceries for the food shelf.

We have a table for your donations. Let’s build a mountain of food! Let’s follow in the footsteps of Deborah and be a hero!