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Title: Unsung Heroes: Deborah

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Text: [Judges 4:4-9](#)

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Today we are continuing our first sermon series for the summer that we are calling Unsung Heroes. In a typical summer, we would be flocking to the local movie theater to see the latest superhero movie, but this is not a typical summer. There are still heroes in our midst, Unsung Heroes, whose lives inspire us and teach us amazing

things. The Biblical story is also full of Unsung Heroes, people whose lives and stories may be unfamiliar to us. We are spending time exploring some of the Unsung Heroes of the Bible. Today we encounter Deborah

Many years ago, a movie called Groundhog Day came out which featured Bill Murray playing a weather person who keeps experiencing the same day over and over. He wakes up at the same time each day to an alarm clock playing Sonny and Cher's "I've Got You, Babe." He has the same day and encounters the same people. He's stuck on the same day, doing the same thing and having the same experiences.

Over the past few months and even before that, perhaps you have felt that way about your own life or our world. We feel like we are stuck in a pattern and in a way of life that is not life-giving. If you feel this way, you are in good company. Our ancestors in faith had this same experience.

The book of Judges records a time in the history of the Israelites, of God's people when they are simply doing the same thing over and over. Here is the pattern:

The people of Israel will live in a manner that is faithful to God, then lose sight of that faithfulness and that way of living. The world would suffer from the way they lived, so they would cry to God for repentance and deliverance. God would send that deliverance through a human leader. God would respond through and work through humans.

Deborah is one such person. She is one of the Judges. She is someone through whom people would understand that God has not forsaken them and that God loves them.

The Judges were leaders, they were people who people came to settle disputes, to even look for a direct decision from God. Here is how the text begins Deborah's story. We are told that the Israelites have been oppressed for twenty years by King Jabin of Canaan and his military leader, Sisera.

Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was a leader of Israel at that time. She would sit under Deborah's palm tree between Ramah and Bethel in the Ephraim highlands, and the Israelites would come to her to settle disputes. She sent word to Barak, Abinoam's son, from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "Hasn't the Lord, Israel's God, issued you a command? 'Go and assemble at Mount Tabor, taking ten thousand men from the people of Naphtali and Zebulun with you. I'll lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, to assemble with his chariots and troops against you at the Kishon River, and then I'll help you overpower him.'" Barak replied to her, "If you'll go with me, I'll go; but if not, I won't go." Deborah answered, "I'll definitely go with you. However, the path you're taking won't bring honor to you, because the Lord will hand over Sisera to a woman." Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. Judges 4:4-9

Deborah is identified as the "wife of Lappidoth" we are not certain that she was married to someone named Lappidoth but it is there for a reason. It means something along the lines of a fiery woman or "woman of torches." Deborah is important to Israel's deliverance. According to the Bible, she is the first and the only female Judge AND also the most important one. She is the one God needed to work through at this time.

When was the last time that God surprised you? Perhaps the last time that God worked differently than you had always thought God worked. I often notice in our prayers, in my prayers, that I ask God to do a certain thing in a certain way.

I believe that we fall into patterns. It's like the movie Groundhog Day. The same thing over and over. We believe that nothing will ever change. Or we believe that God works a certain way and that's the only way that God is going to work. Some might call it cynicism while others might say that we either lose our faith or we get lazy and just box God in.

Who would have thought it would be Deborah and another woman, Jael to deliver Israel?

Who would think it would be high school students here in Fishers that would call us to repent from racism and to consider how we can create a more just society?

This past Monday, in response to the death of George Floyd High school students organized in downtown Fishers. a gathering, a demonstration, and an opportunity to learn more about the systemic racism in our backyard and what we can do about it and how we can work on ourselves. I was there for a while and I know other members of our congregation were present as well. It's estimated that 1500 people came through in the 4-hour timeframe. This was not organized by politicians, or church leaders, or anyone else. It was put on by the High school students in our community who care enough to call us all to confront racism in our community. I'm convinced it was God working through these students and God working in our community. We need deliverance and perhaps God begins to send that deliverance through our students.

We should not be surprised when God works in a surprising way.

We need to celebrate that our God works in surprising ways, the God who does not always use the expected rules and customs of society but goes other ways to do divine work all around us.

It's not the military general Barak, who will receive the glory, rather the female prophet and judge Deborah tells him he will receive no glory. It will be Jael, an unsung hero in her own right, who will outwit and outsmart Sisera so that he and his army are defeated.

Tony Campolo tells a story about a friend of his who likes to on occasion go shopping at the local Nordstrom store. She likes to go at Christmas when the decorations are up and the music is playing. She was looking at some expensive dresses, just looking when she noticed out of the corner of her eye, a woman walked up. By the way she was dressed, she looked to be someone experiencing homelessness. Most of the dresses in this section were a thousand dollars. Tony's friend could not afford them, so she assumed this other person would probably have trouble as well. She expected a security guard to come up any minute, but instead, a salesperson came up. She looked at the woman and said, "Welcome to Nordstrom, how may I help you?"

The bag lady said, "Yeah, I want to buy a dress."

"What kind of dress?" the saleswoman asked in a polite and dignified way.

"A party dress."

"You've come to the right place. Follow me. I think we have some of the finest party dresses available."

The saleswoman spent more than ten minutes matching dresses with the woman's eye color and helping her ascertain which dress would go best with her complexion and preferred taste. After selecting three dresses that they together decided would be good choices, she took the woman into the dressing room.

Tony's friend, watching this exchange in amazement, hurried into the dressing room also and entered the adjoining booth, pressing her ear to the wall so she could hear what was going on. After about ten minutes of trying on the dresses with the saleswoman's help, the bag woman said abruptly, "I've changed my mind. I'm not going to buy a dress today."

"That's all right," the saleswoman said gently, "but here's my card. Should you come back to Nordstrom department store, I do hope that you will ask for me. I would consider it a privilege to wait on you again."

Campolo points out what a beautiful illustration this is of how Jesus might respond if He were a salesperson in Nordstrom.

When it comes to God, things are seldom what they seem. Deborah's story tells us that as she is the one to bring deliverance to Israel. She is a hero because of her faithfulness to God and for her heeding the call of God to be and to do what God desired her to do.

Maybe it's time we move out of old patterns, old patterns of living, old patterns of how we believe God works. Maybe it's time we open our hearts a little more so that we can see those around us, like Deborah, people whose voices and actions will lead to our deliverance.

And lastly, maybe it's time we open our hearts more that we see ourselves differently, to see how God will use us and work through us in new and surprising ways.

Will you pray with me?