

## Thursday, March 30, 2017 - Day 88 – Judges 4-6, Psalm 74, John 8

Judges has a recurrent story. The people 'do evil in the eyes of the Lord'; things go badly for them; they cry out to the Lord for help; God rescues them. In some ways that's the story of the Bible as a whole. The consequences of the human heart and God's willingness to persist in rescuing us from ourselves.

The help that God provides in the book of Judges is through various leaders that he raises up as the 'judges' of Israel. In today's passage these are Deborah and then Gideon. Deborah manages to navigate the complex path of being a woman who is the leader of the nation even in the context of a seriously patriarchal society. You can tell the huge esteem she's held in by the response of the army general Barak. Asked to lead in the army in a battle against Sisera, Barak says, 'Okay Deborah, but only if you come with me...' Deborah's song of praise that she sings with Barak attributes the victory to God's power to save the people.

If Deborah is unusual in a hierarchical and patriarchal society as a woman who leads the nation, Gideon is equally so. Gideon is from the 'weakest clan' and the 'least significant' in his family. God doesn't seem to judge by the same standards that prevail in society at large as to who might be fit to serve. With Gideon we might think forward to King David – who was so insignificant in his family that his father forgot to even introduce him to Samuel the prophet. We judge by externals; God sees the heart.

What might God be calling you to, that you feel inadequate for? Gideon certainly wanted to test God – at least three times in just this chapter; but ultimately he acted courageously and responded to God's call in his life. Barak might have needed more support from Deborah than she thought he needed – but with her at his side, he did get on with the job. It's easy to get discouraged, but God uses frail humans – and often not the 'ideal' candidates to fulfill his purposes throughout the scriptures.

The songs of praise in scriptures are balanced by songs of lament – which we see powerfully in Psalm 74. Sadly, God's people always seem to have the ability to wander from God's path and the consequences are as predictable as they are painful. Nevertheless, when we cry out to God, God is ready to hear and to rescue.

The ultimate 'rescue' is of course the incarnation. God becomes involved personally in humanity's struggle in the person of Jesus. Jesus becomes for us the perfect 'Judge' – we see it in the story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery: wisdom and compassion, together with the hope of transformation. Jesus, later in the passage, declares that although it is the Pharisees who 'judge', not him, that the decisions he does make are grounded in his very identity of being with God the Father. This 'Judge' can be trusted – and when he is 'lifted up' – John's euphemism for crucifixion – then we will finally see God's purpose and know Jesus to be the Son. Jesus is quite prepared, as leader of the people of God, to go ahead into the fight against the powers of darkness and take on himself their full weight. The ultimate captivity is to our own broken hearts – to sin - and Jesus opens the way to deliverance from sin and death.

By The Very Rev. Richard Morgan