

Sermon, St. David's Episcopal, Judges 4:1-7, 11/19/23 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

This morning's collect is my favorite collect of the entire church year. A quick review: the collect of the day can be found on page four of your bulletin. The word looks like the verb "collect," because that's what it does: *collects* the readings of the day into one prayer. While our readings vary over a three-year cycle, the collects come up every year, so each one has to "collect" three sets of readings.

Today's collect, written by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, asks God that we may hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the holy scriptures. Hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest. Isn't that a wonderful collection of images? Hearing the scriptures, especially here in this space together. Reading them by following along. Marking them: I love seeing people's Bibles that are underlined or highlighted. Learning together. But my favorite phrase in that list is "inwardly digest." I adore the idea of slowly chewing on scripture with all of you. Also makes me think of those wonderful edible Bibles the kids made out of rice Krispie treats back in September on the third Sundays.

More than five years ago we started a midday Bible study here at St. David's and inwardly digesting scripture together once a week has been a deep joy for me. This past year we have focused on something called The Women's Lectionary, a year of readings put together that feature women's stories. We have far fewer stories of women in the Bible than men, and Deborah stands out among the women, even though her appearance today is all too brief.

Her appearance is brief but at least she makes an appearance—this is the only snippet of Scripture we get from the book of Judges in the three-year cycle of readings on Sunday. In between the conquest of the Holy Land in the book of Joshua and the beginning of the monarchy in Israel in the book of Samuel we find the book of Judges, during which time the country was led by judges instead of kings. Deborah is one of the six major judges mentioned in the book of Judges, the only woman in the bunch, and the only one we actually see judging, which happens in our reading this morning: "she used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment."

In the United States today we have legislative, executive, and judicial branches, and we have these at the local as well as federal level. Our country is far from perfect, but we try to balance out these arms of government to achieve something just. Imagine if we were run by judges. That was a turbulent time for the Israelites, and women seemed able to eke out a bit more power than during the time of the monarchy, which our readings will focus on in the new church year. Taking power from judges and giving it to kings didn't solve any problems.

Kings and judges show major flaws in the Bible, but Deborah the judge stands out as admirable. Today's translation calls her the wife of Lappidoth, but this could also be translated as fiery