

### **1 Corinthians 12:27-31**

*Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.*

In August of 2000, a man named Danny was rushing off of the subway because he was late for dinner with his boyfriend of three years, Peter. As Danny hustled through the subway station he noticed out of the corner of his eye a bundle that looked like a baby doll tucked over against the wall. He thought it was strange that a doll had been left on the ground, but he continued up the stairs to the exit.

Before moving out of view, Danny glanced back one more time, and then it when he saw the legs move.

Rushing back down the stairs towards the bundle, he found a baby wrapped in a sweatshirt, with the umbilical cord still attached, seemingly content, looking up at him. This being the time before cell phones, he ran back upstairs to a pay phone and called the police. While waiting for them, he realized he needed to call his boyfriend and so he ran back upstairs to call him and when he answered yelled out one of the most impressive excuses for being late for dinner every heard, "I found a baby!"

With that the police did arrive and shortly after that Peter arrived as well. Two hours of questioning later and Danny was free to go. Rattled and stunned, the two men did finally go to get something to eat and Peter said to Danny, "You're going to be connected to that baby in some way for the rest of your life."

Six months later, Danny was asked to testify at a family court hearing which would place the child in pre-adoptive foster care. Peter had to work that day, so Danny went by himself and gave his testimony about how he had found the baby. It was there that he learned that no one had claimed the baby. He was surprised when the judge asked him to stay, rather than leave after his testimony.

At the end of the hearing, the judge called Danny back up to her desk and she asked him, "Would you like to keep the baby?"

Danny responded, "I would... but I don't think it's that easy."

To which the judge responded, "It can be."

Approximately 4,000 years earlier, according to Scripture, the Israelites were caught up in a cycle of sin, suffering, and forgiveness. Israel would worship other gods which would anger YHWH who would then allow enemies to attack Israel. The Israelites would cry out in pain

because of the attacked, YHWH would then take pity on them and would raise up a military leader, called a judge, who would deliver Israel and then the people would return to proper worship of YHWH... until that judge died and then the Israelites would return to their old habits of worshipping other gods.

Wash. Rinse. Repeat.

Today, we read about one of these judges, Deborah.

**Judges 4:1-10** (translated by Dr. Wilda C. Gafney)

*The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died. So the LORD sold them into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-ha-goiim. Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD for help; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and had oppressed the Israelites cruelly twenty years.*

*Deborah, a woman, a female prophet, a fiery woman, she was judging Israel at that time. 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. She sent and called for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "Did not YHWH, the God of Israel, command you? 'Go – march on Mount Tabor, and take ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. I will march towards you to draw to you by the Wadi Kishon Sisera the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand.'" Then Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go." And she said, "I will surely go with you; however there will be no glory for you on the path you are taking, for YHWH will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman."*

*Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and ten thousand warriors went up with him; and Deborah went up with him.*

The Stories of God for the people of God... **thanks be to God.**

In both Danny, Peter, and the baby's story and this ancient story, something gives the judge pause enough to do things in a different way; to view things – and more importantly people – in a way the majority of the world around them might not see.

In the first story, Danny is a gay man, partnered, but with both of them barely making a living enough to live in New York City and the legal right to marry is not even visible on the horizon. In the second story, Barak is supposed to be the military leader that YHWH brought to the Israelites rescue, right? It would fit the pattern. But Deborah sees something different.

Laura Wright Pittman, the artist of today's picture writes, <sup>A</sup>"In the midst of oppression of her people, Deborah creates space for channeling God's wisdom, in the chaos of war she finds stillness under a palm tree and tunes herself to God's voice."

---

<sup>A</sup> Picture of Deborah from Sanctified Art

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says to his disciples: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*

Most of us aren't embroiled in war or trying to determine the fate of an abandoned baby, but in our own anxiety and fears and decision-making, we too are called to turn to God and foster an environment where we are able to listen.

The wisdom of Deborah lies in her willingness to create space. Deborah shows us that, in stillness, and practicing attending to God with fierce trust, we can sift through the chaos of this world and align ourselves with the movement of God.

Pittman describes her image of Deborah:

<sup>B</sup>In this image, Deborah stands firm under her palm tree with her hand open, signifying her openness to God's wisdom and to sharing her voice with others. The chariots of war loom in the distance, but the chariots are empty because, in the midst of impending war, this prophetess can see God's victory before it even takes place.

Deborah's trust in God is quite profound as not only does she recognize that Barak will not be the one who ultimately defeats Sisera. But it will be someone most would not even recognize as an option. At the defeat of his army, Sisera flees on foot to the tent of a non-Israelite woman, a foreigner named, Jael. She welcomes him in and when he asks for water, she brings him milk. I'll let Scripture tell the rest:

*(Sisera) said to (Jael), "Stand at the entrance of the tent, and if anybody comes and asks you, 'Is anyone here?' say, 'No.'" But Jael wife of Heber took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, until it went down into the ground—he was lying fast asleep from weariness—and he died. Then, as Barak came in pursuit of Sisera, Jael went out to meet him, and said to him, "Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking." So he went into her tent; and there was Sisera lying dead, with the tent peg in his temple.*

Our baby boy from the subway has a slightly more gentle ending.

Danny came home from the hearing and told Peter that he had told the judge that he wanted to adopt the baby. This went over about as well as you would expect it to for a couple that had not even discussed having a family. Danny eventually convinced Pete to come and visit the baby with him in foster care. As Pete describes it, "The baby squeezed my finger with his entire hand so hard. He was just staring up at me and I was just looking at him, and it was almost like he found a pressure point in my finger that just opened up my heart to my head and showed me in that moment that I could be one of his parents, one of his dads."

<sup>C</sup>The adoption process began and the judge asked them if Danny and Pete would like to bring the baby home for Christmas... which was three days away and so all of their family and friends got busy helping them set up their apartment for a baby while the men read books like *What to Expect While You're Expecting* as fast as they could.

---

<sup>B</sup> Image from Sanctified Art

<sup>C</sup>

The plan was that the baby would only be with them for a week, but it became clear that he was doing so much better with them than he was in foster care and so he was allowed to stay with them while the adoption process played out.

<sup>D</sup>And the baby who had been known as Danny Ace Doe (Danny for the man who found him, ACE for the subway line where he was found) – was now known by the forever name his soon-to-be official Dads gave him - Kevin.

In 2011, New York became the sixth state in the US to legalize gay marriage, and Danny and Pete decided to make things official. <sup>E</sup>When they told Kevin (now 11), he asked if the same judge who united them as a family could do the ceremony. As it turns out, she could.

<sup>F</sup>Kevin is now 20 years old, and studying mathematics and computer science. And at over six feet tall, he now towers over his dads.

In an article for the BBC, Danny is quoted as saying, “I can’t imagine my life if it didn’t turn out this way. My life has become much more enriched and full. IT has changed my world view, my perspective, my whole lens... I did not know this level of deep love existed in the world until my son came into my life.”

All of this, because a judge was able to take a pause and see something different than what the world was telling her.

All of us are walking into a new thing – a world where a vaccine means we can engage again with family and friends and travel and gathering, including church. It is exciting. And it also can be overwhelming.

What if we took pause to see what God sees – to put our anxieties and mistrust aside – and open ourselves to receiving God’s direction?

Who would be seen in a new way?

Who does God want us to trust?

Who does God think is filled with the right gifts for a time such as this... that maybe the world just isn’t quite seeing the same way?

Maybe... it’s you.

In the name of the Creator, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> A true story. Read about it here: <https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-56409764> or listen to them tell the story on this podcast: <https://thisislovepodcast.com/episode-33-on-the-way-to-dinner>