

A Lineage of Flame

*'Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the Lord I will sing, I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel. 'Lord, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens poured, the clouds indeed poured water. The mountains quaked before the Lord, the One of Sinai, before the Lord, the God of Israel.'*" The Song of Deborah, the song she sang to proclaim the might of Israel's God in the face of King Jabin and the royal terror of the Canaanites. It comes just after our reading this morning, in the fifth chapter. I like to imagine Deborah under her tree, her place of rest and wisdom, joining Barak with a fiery passion as they together marched towards Kedesh. On Mount Tabor, in full view of the Canaanite army, Deborah opened her mouth and, like a trumpet, called forth a song that spelled doom for any who might come against her people.

Her people. They were God's first, yes. But they were hers, too. Called forth from obscurity in a time and place when women were considered property, Deborah stood tall above the boys, the men, and even the generals of Israel's army. She stood tall above them even when sitting under her tree of wisdom. Deborah, prophet and judge over the people. Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth.

Ah. There it is, the reduction of Deborah to being the wife of...the reduction of Deborah from judge over all to Lappidoth's property. It's as if the writers of Judges couldn't resist the cultural pull to link Deborah to her husband, as if that is what cements her meaningful for the world. Yeah...but that's not the whole story. That word translated *wife* can also be translated as, simply, *woman*. And Lappidoth? It's not a name. It means *flames*. So, instead of reducing Deborah to the wife of Lappidoth, let's call her by her real name, her real title, a title befitting a

judge of Israel. Deborah, shouting aloud God's victory on Mount Tabor, is a woman of flames. She's a woman of fiery passion, bringing forth light and truth from within, the burning flame of the God of Israel. She is so much more than a man's wife. She is Deborah, woman of flames, and her story reminds us that God rarely uses the people we expect to bring light into a gloom-saturated world. *Then Deborah said to Barak, 'Up! For this is the day on which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. The Lord is indeed going out before you.'*

This is the way of Israel's God, to pick from obscurity those who will transform the face of the world. Sarah, barren and yet she brought forth a multitude of nations. Rahab, a sex worker whose shrewdness saved Israel's scouts when they first entered Canaan, and an ancestor of Jesus himself. We know Deborah, that woman of flame, and from the days of Jesus, we know of Mary Magdalene, once possessed by 7 demons, but then the very first person to ever deliver the news that the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty. Mary Magdalene, the Apostle to the Apostles.

This is the lineage into which Abby will be baptized, a lineage of power, of prophecy, of proclaiming the wondrous deeds of God to the world. A lineage of strong, powerful women who changed the world despite all that the world brought against them. A lineage of lives lived in celebration of all that God has done, and proclaiming what wondrous things will come next. A lineage of passion, of flame. Here, in this place, a life will be transformed right before our very eyes. We may not see the grace itself, but we see the cool, crisp waters of baptism, and that itself is enough to know that grace is here, that grace has been made real.

“You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever.” Words that will soon be said over Abby, they carry a power, a charge. They tell us that something powerful and mighty has happened to Abby. And then those gathered respond: “We receive you

into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood.” This is no mere ritual, an empty symbol done out of an unholy obligation. This is a mighty act of God, the same God who spoke through Deborah, the same God who spoke through Mary Magdalene, the same God who ensured that a Roman tomb would not hold back the power of Christ.

This is Abby’s lineage, but it’s yours too if you’ve been baptized and sealed as Christ’s own forever. This is Abby’s lineage, but it’s ours too, a lineage that reminds us God is always taking the normalcy of our lives and using them to make a holy difference in the world. Let this baptism remind you of the power that fills your heart. Let this baptism remind you that the light of God is still beating back the world’s gloom. Let these waters wash over you, and be changed *yourself*.