

03.10.24

**“Beauty in Women’s Wisdom”**

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**2 Kings 22:11-20 (CEV)**

<sup>11</sup> When Josiah heard what was in *The Book of God's Law*, he tore his clothes in sorrow. <sup>12</sup> At once he called together Hilkiyah, Shaphan, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, and his own servant Asaiah. He said, <sup>13</sup> “The Lord must be furious with me and everyone else in Judah, because our ancestors did not obey the laws written in this book. Go find out what the Lord wants us to do.”

<sup>14</sup> The five men left at once and went to talk with Huldah the prophet. Her husband was Shallum, who was in charge of the king's clothes. Huldah lived in the northern part of Jerusalem, and when they met in her home, <sup>15</sup> she said:

You were sent here by King Josiah, and this is what the Lord God of Israel says to him: <sup>16</sup> “Josiah, I am the Lord! And I will see to it that this country and everyone living in it will be destroyed. It will happen just as this book says. <sup>17</sup> The people of Judah have rejected me. They have offered sacrifices to foreign gods and have worshiped their own idols. I cannot stand it any longer. I am furious.

<sup>18</sup> “Josiah, listen to what I am going to do. <sup>19</sup> I noticed how sad you were when you read that this country and its people would be completely wiped out. You even tore your clothes in sorrow, and I heard you cry. <sup>20</sup> So I will let you die in peace, before I destroy this place.”

The men left and took Huldah's answer back to Josiah.

**Leader: These are Words of Warning from God!**

All: Thanks be to God!

**Romans 16:1-6, 16-20 (NLT)**

<sup>1</sup> I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deacon in the church in Cenchrea. <sup>2</sup> Welcome her in the Lord as one who is worthy of honor among God’s people. Help her in whatever she needs, for she has been helpful to many, and especially to me.

<sup>3</sup> Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in the ministry of Christ Jesus. <sup>4</sup> In fact, they once risked their lives for me. I am thankful to them, and so are all the Gentile churches. <sup>5</sup> Also give my greetings to the church that meets in their home.

Greet my dear friend Epenetus. He was the first person from the province of Asia to become a follower of Christ. <sup>6</sup> Give my greetings to Mary, who has worked so hard for your benefit.

<sup>16</sup> Greet each other with a sacred kiss. All the churches of Christ send you their greetings.

*Paul’s Final Instructions*

<sup>17</sup> And now I make one more appeal, my dear brothers and sisters. Watch out for people who cause divisions and upset people's faith by teaching things contrary to what you have been taught. Stay away from them. <sup>18</sup> Such people are not serving Christ our Lord; they are serving their own personal interests. By smooth talk and glowing words they deceive innocent people. <sup>19</sup> But everyone knows that you are obedient to the Lord. This makes me very happy. I want you to be wise in doing right and to stay innocent of any wrong. <sup>20</sup> The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. May the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

**Leader: These Words of Paul Are for You, Church.** All: Thanks be to God!

**Please pray with me:**

God of all wisdom, we come to you in thanksgiving and humility seeking your presence and direction. Thank you for today's Bible Study, worship, and fellowship. Open these Scriptures in our hearts and minds, so that we may find beauty in the wisdom of your pastorally called women. Motivate us to seek wisdom from all Godly sources, and to share your divine wisdom with others. Thank you for the many decades of women Christian leaders who bravely answered your call to serve the kingdom despite opposition. I stand on their shoulders, so please speak through the generations and this messenger this morning. Amen.

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Congratulations! You made it to church on time! Turning clocks forward is a bit challenging since we lose that hour. Today is also Baptist Women in Ministry Month of Advocacy. February used to be called BWIM Month of Preaching, but since March 8 is International Women's Day and the month of March is Women's History Month as designated by Congress, it was changed. There is an insert in your bulletin with a little information about the organization. It all started in June 1976 when the executive director of the WMU (Women's Missionary Union) addressed more than 2,500 Baptist women in Birmingham, Alabama calling on them to influence their Southern Baptist church leadership. Several other subsequent meetings encouraged more female servant leaders to answer God's call to ordination. Addie Davis was the first Southern Baptist woman ordained to ministry in 1964, and over the next 18 years, there were 140 additional Southern Baptist women ordained. So, prior to 1984,

there was great support; but as women organized, spoke out, encouraged each another, and gained momentum, the leaders of the SBC ultra conservative faction withdrew their support of women in ministry and changed policies.

In 1990, 3,000 people met in Atlanta for a “Consultation of Concerned Baptists,” out of which the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) was formed. In 1995, at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, associate theology professor, Molly Marshall (*who is an amazing preacher I met through the John Leland Center!*), and the Dean of the Carver School of Social Work, Diana Garland, were forced to resign. By 2009, Pam Durso was hired as BWIM Executive Director to expand the organization, and until 2020, she gathered statistics from national surveys, created discernment retreats for women being called to ministry, built mentoring programs, and developed a robust newsletter with resources for women in seminaries and church leadership. Now, Meredith Stone is our Executive Director with a new vision to “create a Baptist world where women in ministry are wanted, not just permitted; where women in ministry are celebrated, not just tolerated; where women in ministry thrive, not just survive.” CBF, BGAV, American Baptists, your previous co-pastors, and student minister are and were early supporters of this organization; and I am proud to serve on the Virginia Baptist Women In Ministry Board of Directors for two more years. Today’s sermon will highlight only two Biblical women who had influential roles.

Let us begin with one less well known, Huldah, the prophetess. Many Bible readers skim through 1 and 2 Kings, but this is where much of the history is, so I encourage you to study these as well as 1 and 2

Chronicles with a good Bible map beside you. Our context is with King Josiah, who was one of Judah's best kings, reigning over 31 years (640-609 BC). He was a reformer and a restorer of the temple. Under previous kings who insisted upon more pagan rituals, all copies of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) had been destroyed. During the renovation of the temple, one last copy of the *Book of the Law*, as they called it, was discovered. When he heard that news, Josiah tore his robes, convicted of his own sin and his country's sin of past idolatry as he heard God's Word read again as if for the first time.

He gathered five trusted representatives much like we would organize a "Special Committee" to find out what the Lord wanted him to do about it. They went to meet with Huldah, a respected and married prophetess for advice. She said the Lord was angry with Jerusalem because they had forsaken him by worshipping pagan idols instead of God. King Josiah and his people would be punished; but because of her warning and influential wisdom, Josiah immediately instituted religious and spiritual reforms that conformed to the law. All of Judah benefited, and King Josiah was not harmed. The beautiful reward for Josiah was a respectful warrior's death at Megiddo before God's punishment came to Judah for those who had blasphemed. Huldah's influence was certainly counter-cultural, but because of her deep relationship with God whose wisdom she shared with others, Huldah spoke the truth and did not hold back; she was God's messenger regardless of her gender.

In our second passage, we hear from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, and we meet Phoebe, whose name means bright and radiant. In all of Paul's missionary travels, he met many Roman citizens along the

way, so he wanted to communicate with them back in Rome, without actually going there. It was too risky for his ministry, so he enlisted Phoebe as his emissary to deliver this letter. Paul and Phoebe had a sibling-like spiritual relationship; she was a deaconess (the Greek word for female servant is *diakonissa*) of the church at Cenchrea, a seaport east of Corinth. She was not allowed to preach but led and served in acts of charity and hospitality. Some scholars think Phoebe was one of the widows that ministered to the sick or visiting strangers. She had business in Rome but knew no one there. She had also been a great help to Paul and others, so he asked his letter readers to listen carefully and respectfully to her message and to meet her needs on the journey.

He greets 26 people in his letter, several are women: Pricilla (vs. 3), Mary (vs. 6), Tryphena and Tryphosa (vs. 12), Persis (vs. 12), Rufus' mother (vs. 13), Neneris' sister (vs. 15), Junias (vs. 7), and Julia (vs. 15). These women's names are mentioned because they were not just Paul's friends, but were influential helping Paul with kingdom business, hospitality, generosity, and evangelism of the Gospel. This was risky since they worshipped in their homes and could be persecuted for going against the government. The Mary he mentions was probably a Jew, but others were Gentile converts, and it did not matter. Paul warned them in his letter to support and encourage one another, keeping an eye out for enemies—both demonic and human manipulators or flatterers. He feared his friends were too naïve about the potential for evil, or dangerous deceivers, knowing that Satan prowled the minds and hearts of weak men and women. He preached obedience through his letter and through this woman.

What can we take away from these female influencers and servant leaders? That God works through his believers, and they deserve to be heard just as the Gospel deserves to be preached and shared with those who do not know Jesus. On that I think we can agree. What's holding you back? You women of this church have a deep heritage and legacy of pastoral care and hospitality; how can we honor the beauty of such service? Support and encourage one another, you men and women. Let us remember and move forward to dream dreams, experiment, and find the beauty salvation brings! Amen! || *Let us pray.*

Oh God of beauty and discernment, we thank you for those who came before us to share your divine message of love and faith. Help us in this time of Lent to support women in ministry in all their callings and leadership, not just pastors. Educate us; give us patience, more time, good health, strong support, and courage to share the Gospel. May we pray in Jesus' name, **Amen.**