

Session 1

Finding My Boldness

by Sarah S. Henrich

The Story of Deborah

Judges 4:1—5:31

Please read Judges 4:1–6. We meet our first leader, Deborah, under a palm tree in the faraway hill country of Ephraim, north of Jerusalem. The stories of Deborah come from the oldest part of the Bible, yet she is introduced simply and straightforwardly. It seems no comment was required to explain or justify a woman judge in ancient Israel. Identified as both prophetess and wife, Deborah works from home: “. . . the Israelites came up to her for judgment” (Judges 4:5).

It is important to underline how naturally these remarkable facts are presented. It seems that those who put together even these oldest stories accepted the judges whom God sent without quibbling about gender. This does not mean that gender was not important in the thinking of the ancient Israelites; in fact, just a little later in this story of Deborah, she announces to the military man Barak that his God-given success will not lead to his glory because God will give his opponent “into the hand of a woman” (4:9). Yet the fact that Barak takes orders from Deborah does not seem to bother him or diminish his importance. How does Barak understand the role of this remarkable woman, prophetess, judge, and wife? How do we?

Let’s begin with the idea of a judge. In our language and place, judges are connected to the

legal system, hearing cases and making decisions in accordance with that system. Judges are well trained in the theories and practices that make up the law. Whether it is a Supreme Court justice or Judge Judy on television, we know what the judge’s job should be and how much authority he or she has. However, this contemporary picture is far from the biblical word that is translated into English as “judge.” The biblical judges were gifted leaders of the people, called by God to save the people in times of need. God pitied the people’s misery and found leaders who would help them. The Bible tells us that whenever this happened, the Lord “was with the judge,” and the judge was empowered to serve God among the people.

As for Deborah, we have no information about how or why she became one of Israel’s trusted leaders. When we first encounter her, she is already seated under her palm tree and meeting with those who come for her inspired wisdom. Deborah, a married woman who continued in this work, breaks down many of our stereotypes about women in ancient Israel. Our greatest stereotype concerning women’s lack of power and authority is overturned by a few simple words in verse 6: Deborah sends, summons, and then delivers the command of the Lord God of Israel to Barak. With no hedging, no apology, no defensiveness, she simply declares to him what he must do and

what she will do, according to God's command. They both follow through.

How easy to imagine Deborah saying something like, "I hate to bother you, Barak. I know how busy you are, but God has told me to ask you this. I'm not sure why. . . ." Deborah does not do this. Her power is acknowledged as coming from God. She has wielded this power with care over time, so she is trusted. She says what she must say and puts herself on the line to back up God's requests. Neither seeking power nor afraid of it, she trusts that God is indeed with her for the sake of Israel.

Please read Judges 5:1–9

In Judges 5, believed to be the oldest part of the Hebrew Bible, it is Deborah and Barak who together sing the story of God's victory; God was indeed with them. Deborah "arose as a mother in Israel" (Judges 5:7), though her mothering is far from the ordinary image of it. She is the mother of warriors, of victory given to the "commanders of Israel who offered themselves willingly among the people" (5:9). For this, the only response is "Bless the Lord" (5:9).

Deborah's activities seem far from those of our ordinary lives. Yet we may find similarities across millennia and across cultures. Deborah lives a simple life; her work is before her as are her family obligations. She lives among her people until duty calls her to bold action.

It is important for us to ponder her call. The Bible gives no hint of how Deborah comes to know God's command for Barak and the people. Does she have a vision, hear God's word in a dream, or simply sense that the time is right and there is only one person who can command? However she comes to her understanding, she has

to place enormous trust in God to take these very risky steps. She trusts that God is indeed with her. She believes that God will continue in God's promise to be with the people in times of peril. Then she acts upon that with a boldness that can come only from such trust.

Many of us can remember other women and men we have known who have shown this kind of boldness, which springs from steadfast trust in God's presence among us. Most often these are not the people we find interviewed on television or in magazines. Their lives are not dramatic, filled with excitement, danger, or daring. Rather, their lives are marked by persevering faith in the service of God's people, somehow, in some way. Then at some point, that quiet confidence demands a step down a less ordinary, more risky path. Boldness is required to imagine our ordinary lives as lived in the presence of God; it is also required to step out to serve God in more radical ways.

Think, for example, of Rosa Parks going about her work, living a modest life and for long years accepting injustice and harassment. But Parks' deep and abiding faith in a trustworthy, just God led her to a step that changed the face of a nation. Parks was not an aggressive person, but she showed the boldness that springs from faith and the power of God's Holy Spirit.

How does this bold gentleness—the simple, unapologetic strength that springs from confidence in oneself as a child of God—come to life for us and among us in our own days? What messages can we trust? What hopes spring from God's Spirit and not simply our own desires? These are important questions in a time when so many people who hold contradictory views call upon God as the guarantor of their beliefs.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

By considering again Deborah's roles—wife, prophetess, judge—we can begin to imagine our own boldness and what calls it forth.

1. The roles in which we live boldly are multiple and varied. How might boldness look different in one's role as wife, daughter, friend, worshiper, student, worker, employer?
2. From whom did you learn boldness rooted in confident faith?
3. Who inspires you today?

Acts 4:1–31

Please read Acts 4:23–31. Let's look at one more biblical story together to see if we can find any more clues about God-given boldness. In this long story, Peter and John have healed a 40-year-old man who has been lame from birth. This they have done in Jesus' name to the glory of God. But this bold public action has gotten Peter and John into trouble with the local authorities. The two disciples are ordered to cease to “speak or teach” in the name of Jesus. They refuse to make this promise, but they are released anyway because of the support of the people. After returning to their friends and fellow believers (Acts 4:23), these early Christians pray together for the power of the Spirit to “speak your word with all boldness. . . .” At the end of their prayer, God's presence is made amazingly clear to them by a “spiritual earthquake.” The Holy Spirit's

presence is also made clear by the ability they all had to speak the word of God “with boldness.” There it is again!

Ordinary people gather together to pray, share stories of God at work among them, share their hopes, and study Scripture. What happens? They are filled with the Spirit, given confidence to speak based on God's presence with them. Barriers of status and gender fade before the Spirit's empowerment to serve God's people—and serve they do. Knowing that the cost may be great, these women and men—some whom we know, some whom we don't—go forward with boldness to share the Good News of God's presence and power for us all.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Are these people so different from us? They do the same kinds of things that we, baptized in the name of Jesus, also do. How might we participate in this kind of boldness?
2. What does it mean that we can do this?
3. How is boldness connected to the idea of taking up one's cross?

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Session 1: Finding My Boldness

The Story of Deborah

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Materials and preparation

It is useful to have writing materials and Bibles (a variety of translations can add interest to the discussion) available for participants. For at least the first session, name tags are helpful as well. If possible, participants should sit in such a way that they can see one another's faces; this will encourage conversation. For the closing, you will need copies of the Lutheran *Book of Worship, This Far by Faith*, or another hymnal.

Overview

This study focuses on how two quite different biblical characters came to be bold witnesses to God in their daily lives. We can glimpse the sources and the outcome of this boldness in their stories. We read about Deborah in both story and poetry in the Old Testament book of Judges. The song of Deborah is one of the oldest portions of the entire Bible. Peter's story is told in the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament, which comes from a much later time. These two stories together remind us that God has been inspiring women and men with confident boldness from the beginning. Whatever our circumstances, as different as we may be each from the other, we are called to live confident of God's presence and work among us. We never know when our lives may become witnesses to God's power.

You may want to read the introduction to the study together. Take time to point out the ques-

tions at the end of the first introduction (page 30) and remind participants to keep them in mind as they move through the study. Before moving on, ask participants to recall a time when they felt particularly confident in a decision or action. Offer just a few minutes to share their recollection with one other person.

The Story of Deborah

Point out the straightforward way in which the Bible tells the story of Deborah. In this ancient story, a woman of Israel holds a very responsible position of public authority. Encourage participants to think about women in such positions today (including themselves). What are some of the difficulties that women face in such roles?

The story also makes clear that Deborah is a wife. In Deborah's society, husbands had authority over their wives both legally and by custom. What kinds of conflict might Deborah have experienced between her calling as judge under God's authority and her calling as wife under her husband's authority? Are such conflicts different for men and for women?

Ask your group to imagine some ways in which Deborah may have begun to understand her call to her work. Participants may draw their ideas from other biblical stories or from their own experiences. Participants might compare the call of Moses (Exodus 3:1–4:17) or of Mary (Luke 1:26–38) or of Paul (Acts 9:1–19). These calls are all very

different in terms of witnesses to the process, the appearance of special signs, the giving of a clear message from God, the response of the one called. God does not force an acceptance of the call, though God or God's messenger is persistent.

These examples of various divine calls and various human responses should open our eyes to the plethora of ways that God engages us and guides us into lives of service. Ask participants in what ways each of us might experience a call from God today. Such calls often come from the recommendation of others, our own perceptions of a need that must be filled, family expectations, or personal experiences of many kinds. Lutherans believe that God sets us in a variety of roles in which we are called to live our Christian lives. You might ask each participant to jot down how she is called by God in her own life.

Paul and John in Acts

The story in Acts 4 speaks directly to us of the connection between the power of the Holy Spirit and our own boldness. In Acts 2, we hear that it is Jesus who pours out the Holy Spirit from his place at God's right hand (Acts 2:33). In this assertion, the author of Acts tells us that the Holy Spirit is God alive and at work among us as Jesus was. Believers could trust that they were not on their own, but that God's power for good would work through them just as it had through God's people for so long. This power is also for us, the baptized children of God who have received the promised Spirit. Your study group may want to think about how we experience and recognize the Spirit in our midst.

Questions to Ponder

The questions on page 33 are designed to encourage participants to make connections between boldness based on God's call and the different

calls we experience in our lives. As leader you may have to choose one or two questions for discussion in the group. There are many ways to approach these questions. Participants may want to jot down answers and share them. Groups of just two or three can share responses briefly. Some participants may keep an informal journal of responses to questions. Be sure to encourage everyone to speak or write responses. When responses are shared aloud, help the group focus on hearing from each person. Discussing or correcting responses will discourage conversation. Make sure that no one feels forced to respond if she is uncomfortable.

Don't be afraid of your creativity. Boldly try ways to foster discussion for participants in your time and place. Group members may wish to discuss particular questions. If the group discovers a topic or question of interest, participants are likely to benefit from discussion.

Closing

Keep the closing simple. You may wish to sing a hymn, read the prayer from Ephesians 6:14–17, or pray the Lord's Prayer together. Some possible hymns include *LBW* 383, 393, 403, 406, 436, 486, or *TFFB* 225, 232.

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Session 2

Boldness in My Community

by Sarah S. Henrich



The Story of Abigail, Nabal, and David

1 Samuel 25:2–42

Please read 1 Samuel 25:2–8. The beginning of this story might lead us to think that the main character will be a man: “There was a man in Maon” suggests that what follows will be about a rich, powerful man with vast properties. But the storyteller has a surprise in store: This man’s name is Nabal, which means *fool* in Hebrew. Nabal is foolish, and worse, he is surly and mean (25:3). The story is really about his “clever and beautiful” wife, Abigail, whose boldness, confidence, and ability to make quick decisions and act on them will save all of Nabal’s holdings—all, that is, except Nabal himself.

As we get into the story of Abigail and Nabal, keep in mind that the story centers on two very important themes for life in biblical times (and still today). The first theme is *hospitality*, which creates social bonds. The second theme, which will show up a little later in the story, is *God’s covenant*, which continues to function and abide among God’s people. Both these themes are about life in community. Hospitality has to do with the ways human beings interact and make community possible. God’s covenant has to do with God’s hospitality toward us; it is the basis for community life in every age. How does boldness connect to these themes? Let’s look further.

A Plea for Food

The story begins as Nabal’s entire household is busy with a huge communal sheep-shearing project, like a cattle roundup or barn raising. Everyone is involved. The shearing is taking place near where David and his men are still hiding in the wilderness, and the relationship between David’s band and Nabal’s shepherds has been good: David’s men had protected Nabal’s men and had treated them with respect and fairness. In this time and place, a massive sheep shearing (over 3,000 sheep) would be a time for both hard work and hard play, with feasting and food aplenty. When David hears about the shearing, he sends some men to ask Nabal, very politely, to share some of that plentiful food with David’s hungry men.

A Dangerous Response

Please read 1 Samuel 25:9–13. Nabal, true to his name (fool), responds to the request with insults. David, in an angry face-saving move, arms his men to go after Nabal; he is, perhaps, as foolish as Nabal. Luckily, one of Nabal’s servants goes to Nabal’s wife, Abigail, and warns her that Nabal’s stingy, rude response to David and his men will cause trouble.

Within his community—his large household or clan—Nabal is like a king. There are expectations for the powerful: It is a sacred duty for a king or head of household to offer hospitality, not insults, to others who ask for food or a place to rest. Nabal

fails in that elemental duty. Even worse, there is a more binding debt that Nabal owes David: David's men had helped guard Nabal's sheep and shepherds. Nabal owes them; it is his turn to give back to David's men. Nabal's refusal breaks all the rules of hospitality and obligation.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

Nabal has the power of his wealth and his men. He boldly exercises this power to disregard the obligations of hospitality and mutual help.

1. Describe how this kind of boldness—really arrogance—is not helpful, how it is destructive.
2. Boldness is not inherently a good thing. It can serve God's people and purposes, or it can be self-serving. Can you think of some examples in your local community or in the world community?

Abigail Acts to Save

Please read 1 Samuel 25:14–31. Abigail does not hesitate when one of Nabal's men tells her what is going on. Without speaking to Nabal, she rushes to gather food and load it on donkeys. She sneaks away; after all, she is going against her husband's wishes, and wives in that time and place were expected to be obedient to their husbands. But Abigail is obedient to God and follows her own God-given sense of hospitality and justice.

When she meets the angry David, she does three wise things. First, she apologizes for her husband's foolishness. Second, she reminds David of his own calling from God, a calling that does not allow for revenge and blood-stained hands. Abigail speaks so sensibly and directly to David

that she helps him see the big picture, not simply Nabal's insult and his own anger. David learns an important lesson in self-restraint that he will continue to need when he rules in Israel. (We know from later episodes in David's life that his habit of acting on impulse continued to get him into trouble.) Finally, Abigail wisely asks David to remember her. It will not go easily for her when she goes back to her husband; she had defied him in public.

David's response also has three parts: He blesses, or thanks, God for sending Abigail to him to prevent him from taking on blood guilt for vengeance; he blesses Abigail's good sense and decisive action; and finally, he blesses, or thanks, Abigail herself for her wise words.

Abigail's Honesty

Please read 1 Samuel 25:36–42. This is not the end of the story. Abigail goes home and waits until Nabal is sober to tell him what she has done. Abigail wins the prize for honesty, and she gets a surprise too: Nabal's heart stops when he hears what Abigail has done. Her behavior is so shocking, so unheard-of, that Nabal simply dies, "struck by the Lord." David later marries Abigail, and she feels safe and protected. We might imagine that David feels the same way with such a bold woman of wisdom as his wife.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Do you understand some of your bold actions as a response to God's call in your life?
2. What kinds of courage and confidence do these actions demand of you or inspire in you?

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

David's response is thoughtful and generous. He respects Abigail's actions on behalf of her household and God's people.

1. Have you ever spoken up in a situation and felt really heard? What effect did being heard have on you?
2. What connection do you see between self-respect and the respect given to us by others?
3. How might respectful listening help people become confident or bold?

What We Can Learn

This story is rich with ideas and images. We know that in some ways this story is still lived out by many women and children, and some men, in our world today. Some of the questions raised by the story of Abigail and Nabal and David are hard to answer. Questions about relationships, women, power, and violence come up that give us much to ponder.

It takes a second look to see how Abigail saves David *for* God's covenant work. God chose David to be king while he was still a boy tending his father's sheep. Through the long years of waiting, God supports David, and David is an obedient servant of God. But had he acted on his anger, he would have taken on blood guilt and probably would have forfeited his anointed role as God's leader. Abigail reminds him of his larger purpose in life. She is like an angel from God, a messenger who tells the truth about the consequences of choices.

So in a dangerous situation, in which either of the two powerful men might well take her life, Abigail speaks openly and boldly to David. The differ-

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

Abigail is a tough, smart woman in a man's world.

1. What kinds of thoughts might have run through her mind as she was making her decision about what to do?
2. Abigail's confidence in the faithfulness and justice of God gave her courage to speak boldly to David. What gives you courage?
3. What holds you back from stating the truth as you see it?
4. Can you think of ways that communities can support those who dare to speak the truth?
5. What are some of the dangers and benefits of being bold for the sake of God's beloved creation?

ence between David and Nabal could not be clearer. David understands that Abigail is calling him to stronger, more powerful actions than mere brute revenge; he is utterly grateful for her interference. But Nabal's heart turns to stone, and he dies.

Abigail seems to know something my mother used to tell me. I was the oldest of four children. When fights broke out among us, our mother would often (it seemed to me) single me out to stop the fight. "It's not fair," I would whine, and I would list all the grievances I had against my sister or brother. And she would say, "It takes a bigger person to end a fight than to keep it going." That's what David hears from Abigail. And it's true!

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Session 2: Boldness in My Community

The Story of Abigail, Nabal, and David

by Sarah S. Henrich

Materials and preparation

For the closing of this session, you will need copies of *Lutheran Book of Worship, This Far by Faith*, or another hymnal.

Overview

This study focuses on one chapter in the long saga of David's journey from shepherd boy to king of Israel. God's covenant promise is protected and David's calling is preserved by the bold action of one woman, Abigail. Abigail broke one set of rules (her husband's) in order to follow more important rules (justice and hospitality). Her boldness in doing the will of God saved her household and David.

Our Bible story begins in the usual way. We are introduced to a man who we suppose is the main character, but a Hebrew reader would quickly recognize the clue in his name, Nabal, the fool. This name lets us know that this story will be unusual and ironic. Now that we know this, we can read the story with eyes wide open to twists and surprises.

Read the Bible story together in the segments suggested. As you move into the story, you may want to list the characters on a chalkboard or easel. It quickly becomes clear that this story involves a large household. Abigail and Nabal were responsible for their extended family and all those who work for them. When Nabal denied David's

request for food, he endangered a large group of people.

Abigail went counter to her husband's wishes, a dangerous thing to do in that society, when she followed the rules of hospitality and obligation in order to preserve her family. Her bold action was not only for her own protection!

Another unusual note in this story is that Nabal's young man turned quickly to Abigail for help (vv. 14–17). He was well aware that Nabal's authority was compromised by his foolishness. He turned to Abigail as the real source of wisdom. These few verses may give participants a chance to consider how often there is an unofficial figure of power, authority, and decision-making. Women have often been in this position, just as Abigail was, because laws or customs or both have allowed them to exercise authority only in a hidden or secondhand way. How does this kind of position connect with boldness?

It is important for participants to know that David's anger would not have surprised ancient readers. Mediterranean societies ran on the principles of honor and obligation. Because David and his men had done a favor to Nabal by protecting his shepherds, Nabal owed David a favor. His refusal to honor his obligation deprived David and his men of food, but even more importantly,

Nabal dishonored David and made David look bad. Nabal's action challenged David to respond.

Yet, as Abigail pointed out, for David to slaughter Nabal's innocent men would bring their blood on David, and a feud would have begun, keeping David from his true calling to rule Israel. The ancient storyteller counts on the readers to know all these things. These readers would also know that David is in an impossible place: He, as future king of Israel, could not show himself as weak and ridiculous to his own men; yet he did not want a blood feud.

Abigail's decisive disobedience to her husband saved the day for David. He was able to save face; after all, he received that for which he asked, plus an apology from the wise Abigail. He saved his men and himself from terrible consequences. Abigail's choice had effects far beyond her household; it changed the history of her people.

Her decisiveness stemmed from her confident affirmation of the ways of God and her trust in the God who had called David to lead the people. God rewarded the boldness with which she defied her foolish husband in two ways: First, Nabal died without harming her, and second, David took her as his own wife.

In several sections of the Bible study, there is a box called "Questions to Ponder." Leaders should read through these questions before the study session and choose two or three questions that you think will be valuable for discussion in your group. There are many ways to approach these questions. Please see the Session 1 Leader Guide (June issue) for some suggestions, but always let the needs and style of your group be your guide. Be bold in using your own creativity as well. It may be that you want to plan your study session in cooperation with another person or two. Sharing ideas for getting conversations going and bringing them to good conclusions is an asset.

Closing

For the closing, you might sing a hymn (see suggestions in the June issue Leader Guide); read again Ephesians 6:18–20 and pray the Lord's Prayer.

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Christianity without Fairy Tales When Science and Religion Merge

by Jim Rigas

Were all of Jesus' disciples men as the New Testament tells us? Was Eve really deceived by Satan causing the downfall of the entire human race as the Old Testament maintains? Who were the "Christ's Brides" of the first four centuries AD? In a provocative, well documented, yet highly readable book, a scientist looks at our Christian heritage from the Creation Stories to the Nicene Creed separating truth from myth - Presents facts, asks questions, suggests further readings. A perfect book for Bible study groups, or enjoy it by yourself. More details at <www.jimrigas.com> or word-search through it at <www.amazon.com>. Soft cover, 490 pages, \$22.50 - Order today. For 10% off and immediate free shipment call Pathway Book Service at (800) 345-6665.

Session 3

Boldness in My World

by Sarah S. Henrich



The Stories of Naaman's Slave Girl and Apollos

The Bible is full of stories of God's people being called to act with confident boldness in an unfriendly world. The big names and memorable events are inspirational: Think of Moses standing before Pharaoh demanding the release of God's people or Joshua marching his small group of stalwart men around the walls of Jericho. Consider the bravery of Rahab, the prostitute who helps Joshua's spies in order to secure protection for her family. What about Mary, the mother of Jesus? Or Joseph, who is bold enough to trust the dreams sent by God? And surely when we think of boldness, we remember Paul, who dares to change his mind and heart and trust the call of Jesus. These and many others form a cloud of witnesses to our faith that God empowers us with the Holy Spirit to do more than we could ever believe possible.

In this session we will meet some lesser-known members of God's family who were called to bold actions beyond their own communities. Their stories may help us imagine more boldly how God works in our own lives. As we meet these people from far-away places and ancient times, we will see how trust in God can lead anyone in any circumstance in life to reach out to others with confidence and hope.

The Story of Naaman's Slave Girl

2 Kings 5:1–19

Please read 2 Kings 5:1–5. This story is often

described as the story of Naaman. He is the lead character, after all, and we hear in the first verse that he is commander of the army of the king of Aram. He is a great man, in high favor with his king. Yet Naaman has leprosy. Here is a man who has everything except his health. On the other end of the spectrum stands our *real* main character: a young girl taken captive and made a slave to Naaman's wife. In her situation, survival depends on silent obedience and keeping her head down. She is far from home and family, legally unprotected, and not even named in this story. However, this girl does not keep her head down in frightened obedience. She offers a word of hope to her mistress, Naaman's wife: "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy" (v. 3).

Can we even understand the great risk she takes in speaking up this way? In full assurance that the God of Israel can heal (and even *will* heal a foreigner), and in full confidence that God works through the prophet, she boldly offers her suggestion. What if it doesn't work out? What if Naaman or Mrs. Naaman are insulted by the idea of going to see a prophet of Israel? Worse, what if they feel it an insult to their own god?

This brave girl goes out on a very thin and fragile limb. She speaks a word of hope and confidence into the ear of a powerful woman and then a highly placed man, confident in a power greater

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. The slave girl in this story would have been almost invisible in her time and place. Who is invisible in our time and place?
2. How do we make opportunities to listen to people who are different from us?
3. If God turns to those who seem invisible to carry God's word, where might we turn to hear that word in our day?
4. Like Naaman, have you ever been surprised to find God present in a place you didn't expect?
5. Do you think Naaman's healing is connected to his willingness to trust the words of people who were unknown or unimportant to him (his wife's slave girl, the prophet, his own slaves)? What leads you to think the way you do?

than any earthly kingdom. She has confidence in God's will for the well-being of all human beings. Even though her own circumstance, slavery in a foreign land, might argue against the power of her God to save, she is still bold in her faith.

Please read 2 Kings 5:6–19. Naaman, instead of letting his illness control his fate, takes the slave girl's suggestion and puts his destiny in God's hands. The mighty man takes an entourage with him and goes to the prophet. "What can he be thinking?" people must have wondered. As the story unfolds, we learn that Naaman almost throws away his opportunity: When he is not treated with the respect he thinks he deserves, he does not trust

the cure that the prophet Elisha prescribes. Finally, his own servants intervene with a quiet word, and Naaman listens to them. He is freed from his leprosy and becomes a worshiper of the God of Israel.

As we have seen in this story of the young girl and the mighty general, boldness does not have to be loud or in your face. It does not require a pulpit or a podium with a microphone. Sometimes bold speech is like a pebble thrown in a pond, making ripples that spread out in ways that are hard to predict. In our second story we will see how a young man acts boldly in his time and place, thousands of years later, and causes ripples that come down to our own time.

The Story of Apollos

Acts 18:24–28 (1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:1–9, 21–23)

Please read Acts 18:24–28. Apollos looks like one of those eager students who is impatient to jump in and save the world before he is quite ready. Indeed, it can be one of God's great gifts that some of us sometimes rush in to share our excitement, even when it is a little raw. Recall how careful the slave girl is in the story from 2 Kings. Conversely, that's how impetuous Apollos is in this story from Acts.

We meet this Jew from Alexandria in the city of Ephesus—another one of God's family far from home, away from his own people. What is he doing there? Both Ephesus and Alexandria are large cities, renowned for learning and sophistication. Apollos has moved in learned circles all his life and is described in verse 24 as eloquent, an ancient way of describing a well-educated man. He knows his Bible and is at home in both the Jewish (minority) and Greco-Roman (majority) cultures. When he hears about Jesus, he gets it!

His excitement is intense, and he speaks openly about Jesus in the synagogue.

Here is a man bold enough to change his mind, to expand his faith, to move beyond what he already knew. This kind of boldness is often the most difficult. How often are we able to take what we know and push past it to new vistas of understanding? How often can we move from our deep roots, as Apollos does, and see new understandings and beliefs flower from those same roots? It takes great personal boldness.

Apollos does not stop there, satisfied to have achieved a great insight that reshapes his life. He goes on to speak publicly and openly of his great belief about Jesus even when it might create difficulty for him. This is daring indeed. But it is not the end of the story for Apollos still has things to learn.

Please re-read Acts 18:25–26. He is taken aside by Priscilla and Aquila, two devout believers who had worked with Paul, traveled with him to Ephesus, and stayed there to nurture the young community of believers. These two teach Apollos the difference between John's baptism and baptism into the name of Jesus. Apollos must come to grips with more changes in his beliefs, even after he has spoken of his beliefs in public. For Priscilla, Aquila, and the other believers, as well as for Apollos himself, the empowerment given by baptism in the name of Jesus must be truly and rightly shared. The source of boldness and confidence in God's presence is the Holy Spirit, given in that baptism of Jesus.

Apollos is willing to learn. Sometimes our greatest boldness and confidence in God is shown by our willingness to learn to see God's presence in the world in new ways. Notice how willing Apollos is to receive

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

Apollos is excited and ready to go. It takes courage and confidence for him to slow down and learn more fully how to speak God's good news.

1. When have you had to slow down and learn a little more?
2. Whom did you trust to teach you? How did you feel?
3. For adults, being corrected and changing our mind in public can be embarrassing. Why do we think we need not be learning all the time? What makes us embarrassed about re-thinking our old ways?
4. How is repentance, an accepted and cherished part of Christian life, connected with changing one's mind?
5. Have you ever had to face the fact that you have not been given certain gifts that you wished you had? How did you come to the realization of your own limitations?
6. God has given us gifts for the world. How do you use your gifts?

help from other believers. Priscilla and Aquila help him, as do those who encourage him and recommend him to the disciples in Corinth. Confident enough in his own particular gifts, Apollos is not afraid to learn to use his gifts better and more widely. It requires personal honesty and boldness to accept one's limitations and remain confident in one's gifts.

Conclusion

Our stories in this session have been about people

far from home who cared so deeply about their fellow human beings that their insistence on sharing God's good news for humankind could not be stopped. They spoke out wherever they were to express their confidence in the work of God. We cannot measure the effects over these thousands of years of the public proclamation of one servant girl, one apostle, one eager young man. We cannot fully measure the effects of our own best efforts, whether small or great, to care for our neighbors as God's children. All we can do is receive the gift

of boldness in the Lord, rely on our communities to call out of us what they need, and act on it. This may not be a prescription for an easy life, but it is a call to the great adventure of serving the God we know in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit—one bold step at a time.

Sarah S. Henrich is associate professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. She has written and led many Bible studies for a wide variety of groups throughout the Lutheran church.

Thank you for participating in the *Lutheran Woman Today* summer Bible study.

Now is the time to look ahead to the September 2005–May 2006 study. See page 36 in this issue for more details. We believe it will be another favorite.

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Session 3: Boldness in My World

The Stories of Naaman's Slave Girl and Apollos

by Sarah S. Henrich

Materials and preparation

For the closing of this session, you will need copies of *Lutheran Book of Worship*, *This Far by Faith*, or another hymnal.

Overview

This session focuses on God-given boldness that sends us out into the world where we seek to serve our neighbors (even our enemies) in whatever role we find ourselves. Participants will have a chance to consider lesser-known people of faith who have shown their boldness in different ways. These people, like pebbles thrown into a pond, make an impact not in a big, showy way, but by beginning a set of ripples that grow wider and wider. In fact, those people, like most of us, probably could not guess what sort or how much of an impact their actions would make. Yet we dare to confess our faith, trusting that God can make use of us.

This session, like Session 2, is divided into sections. Each section includes “Questions to Ponder.” These are not questions with right or wrong answers, and there are more questions than a group can work with in one session. Leaders, please read through these discussion questions before your group gathers and choose two or three for your group’s discussion. There are many ways to approach these questions. Please see the Session 1 Leader Guide in

the June issue of *Lutheran Woman Today* for some suggestions, but as always, let the needs and style of your group be your guide. As suggested in Session 2, you may want to plan your session with a partner or two, in order to share some ideas about how to get conversations going and bring them to good conclusions.

The Story of Naaman's Slave Girl

This story is profound on many levels. It is a story of bold trust in God on the part of a young female captive. It is a story of desperate hope on the part of a powerful, proud man and his wife. It is a story of making the wrong approach, trying to buy with power and authority that which is freely given, the healing help of God. In all these stories within the story, there are elements of boldness.

We have focused on the boldness of the young woman who had no power at all; she was a slave in the household of her captor. She lived in a foreign and hostile culture, and she had clearly been paying attention to what is happening around her. She knew about her master’s illness; she knew about the powers of the prophet back in her homeland; and she knew that she was called by God to love even her enemy. No one would blame this girl for being too fearful or too angry to say anything that might help her captor; we are amazed that she did.

The word of hope was heard and taken out of her hands. It took hope for Naaman, a mighty general, to ask permission to return to an enemy country to seek help. It is easy to imagine his wealthy friends wondering, “Don’t we have good doctors here? Why is he going to see that shaman?” But Naaman was willing to risk that his slave girl might be right. He humbled himself to listen to her.

It requires boldness to speak up when no one expects you to have anything to say. It also takes boldness to listen to someone whom your world considers unimportant and uninformed. God calls us to both kinds of daring—daring to hear those we consider to be of lower status *and* daring to speak generously to those who consider themselves above us.

Of course, as the story goes on, humility became just too much for Naaman, and he was ready to scorn the cure offered for his leprosy. But once again, he dared to listen to a servant’s voice and followed through, eventually to be healed of his leprosy and of his idolatry.

The Story of Apollos

Changing your mind about your own deeply held convictions takes as much boldness as anything—perhaps more. This is the story of a learned young man from the most cultured city in the ancient Mediterranean world. As a Jew, Apollos (who has a Greek name!) was likely to have learned both the religious traditions of his own people and the patterns of thought and speech of the Greek-speaking world around him. By Apollos’ time, there was already a long tradition of thoughtful Jewish writers who tried to make sense of their faith and their scriptures for the surrounding cultures. We still have many of these writings today. We can understand the difficulty of continuing in the faith as the culture changes around us and challenges us.

Apollos had heard of John the Baptist and of Jesus. Convinced that something important had happened through Jesus, he preached in Ephesus, another city of learning and sophistication, about how God was changing the world. Yet somehow, he hadn’t put it all together. Apollos needed a little more time and a little more instruction before he was able to preach truly that Jesus had come as God’s Messiah. This instruction he humbly received. He acknowledged his ignorance and willingly took on the task of more learning.

This is difficult. Who likes to be told that they are not speaking with full understanding? But Apollos cared more for God’s truth than for his own pride. So he revised his preaching and boldly went out to the congregations around the Mediterranean with his renewed message. We cannot guess how many people were shaped by Apollos’ preaching. Surely he was a pebble cast into a pond. We can be shaped by his example: daring to speak, daring to receive correction, and daring to speak again instead of falling into embarrassed silence. Such boldness calls for deep confidence in the God who calls us to serve, forgives our fumbling and limited efforts, and sends us forth again.

Closing

For the closing, you might sing a hymn (see suggestions in the Leader Guide to Session 1, the June issue); again read Ephesians 6:18–20; and pray the Lord’s Prayer.

Sarah S. Henrich is associate professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. She has written and led many Bible studies for a wide variety of groups throughout the Lutheran church.