

You may have never heard of Jael before, and for good reason. She is only mentioned twice in scripture and only for a few verses. It's not much. In fact, I had never heard of her until my Old Testament class my first year of seminary. And there is so much going on in the book of Judges, so many twists and turns that she could easily get lost in the mayhem. Yet, Jael is my favorite person in the entire Bible. She is not one to be lost in the mayhem and because of that, she is the one who speaks to me most.

You see, Jael is essentially a housewife. We don't know much about her other than her husband's name, what tribe she belongs to, and the fact that the girl knows how to handle a tent peg. As part of the nomadic Kenite tribe, it was her job to set up the tent. It was one of her domestic responsibilities. And while a war is raging on around them, the Kenites need not worry because we are told that King Jabin of Hazor and the clan of Heber the Kenite were at peace. As a result, Sisera didn't need to fret when Jael invited him in for some warm milk and to hide from the Israelite army.

A few things strike me about this invitation. First, it was very unorthodox for a male visitor to come into a tent without the husband present. This though apparently does not bother Sisera or Jael. Second, as a woman alone with a male, Jael could have been in great danger. And I say this as a woman in the 21st century who is all too aware of the threats that exist for the female gender. I mean, I still bring mace and wear an ID band any time I'm even running outside of my own neighborhood. Because quite frankly, we have always had

to think about situations and scenarios that men have the privilege of not having to think about. She could have easily been assaulted, especially given the heightened emotions of war, but Jael doesn't seem concerned and that has always stuck with me. And third, she doesn't say a word to anyone about her plan. She doesn't ask her husband for permission. She says nothing. Jael is clearly not the gossiping sort because everyone, including Sisera, is left in the dark.

Jael was a housewife. She was a housewife armed with a tent peg. Jael also changed the course of history. Think about that. This unassuming woman managed to kill the leader of the superior Cannanite army with a tent peg.

Church, I am not standing up here and glorifying violence. That's not the point to this sermon. I am simply pointing out that a woman by the name of Jael was instrumental in the Israelites settling in the Promised Land and no one ever talks about her. Do you know the story of David and Goliath? Of course you do! Switch Jael for David and a peg for a slingshot and you've got yourself the same story. We teach that story in Vacation Bible School and Sunday School classrooms without a second thought. So why is Jael minimized in history? Why don't we know her name?

Well, gather round, folks. I've got a theory on that. First, I'm going to state the obvious. She is a woman. Jael was cursed to be born with two X chromosomes through no absolutely fault of her own. In fact, we can't even learn about Jael without also learning about her husband, Heber. Her identity is shared with her husband. Now this annoys me for obvious reasons, but in

truth, Jael cannot even own her own identity. She can't just be herself.

Second, she flips gender roles 100% on their heads. As a housewife in what is considered around 8th century BCE, Jael is supposed to be submissive. She is supposed to be subservient to her husband and to stick to her work in the tent. And to her credit, she does! She even offers Sisera a glass of milk! But, most certainly not for the maternal, nurturing reasons that we associate with most women. Well folks, Jael is NOT most women. Jael will not be limited and kept captive by traditional gender roles and praise God for that, "because the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman."

Lastly, we don't know about Jael because she is but a footnote in the Bible. But she is a footnote in the Bible in the exact way that Shiprah and Puah are footnotes. If you recall, Shiprah and Puah were the midwives back in Exodus who defied the Egyptian pharaoh and refused to kill the male Hebrew babies. It is because of Shiprah and Puah that Moses lived. It is because of Shiprah and Puah that Moses grew into the great leader of Yahweh's chosen people and led them out of Egypt. And church, where would we be without Moses? Better yet, where would we be without Shiprah and Puah? Where would we be without these women who disobeyed orders and rebelled in their own quiet, powerful way?

These women weren't seen as threats. These women weren't seen as powerful or important. These women did not have fancy titles or any kind of political or social influence. They were normal women. They were normal people, just like you and me. But these women were underestimated.

And these women, these women, said forget tradition, forget listening to what man tells me to do. Because I do not answer to man. I answer to God. And that siblings in Christ, that is the absolute beauty of this story. That is the part that gives me chills. These women were empowered by the Holy Spirit to serve God in specific times and in specific ways. And what is even more amazing is that they answered the call.

I can tell you from personal experience, and I guarantee you every woman here has a similar story, that it's hard. It's hard to be a woman in a man's world. And despite the fact that this church has had female pastors, the Church world is still a masculine place to be. Just ask any female who has tried to find a maternity clergy robe! They aren't as easy to find as one would think! As women in ministry, as women in this world, we are underestimated. We are not seen as strong enough or wise enough. Like Jael, we are seen as just women. Some of us just housewives. And even in this year, even in 2022, women continue to be underestimated. We have come a long, long way in this country with a female vice president and a woman of color as a Justice on the supreme court, but we still have a long way to go. Even today as I speak women are having to fight for control of their own bodies. It is frustrating and it is maddening and I could rant about it all day, but by the grace of God, because of the grace of God, we are enough. We are seen by our Triune Lord as capable, as able to do God's work, as the perfect people to answer God's call. Because let's face it, God works in broken, beautiful, imperfect people. And y'all, we are all broken, beautiful, and

imperfect. Black, white, male, female, straight, gay, all of us. God works in people that no one would expect. God uses even what the outside world sees as the lowliest people, as the least valuable and uses them for God's redemptive aims.

Jael was able to kill Sisera because she was underestimated, yet God worked through her. Shiprah and Puah were able to save Moses because they were underestimated, yet God worked through them. And the thing is, we've seen it time and time again since. We've seen God work in people who the world underestimates. In 1955 a distraught, devastated, but determined African American mother from Mississippi changed the face of the Civil Rights Movement in America. "I want the world to see what they did to my boy," Mamie Till-Mobley stated as they left the casket open to reveal her son, Emmet's mutilated and tortured body. In 2006 a woman who was raised in a low-income housing project in the Bronx New York coined the phrase "Me Too" to encourage and support other women who had endured the trauma of sexual assault. Tarana Burke was the spark that started the "Me Too" movement and in 2017 was named Time Magazine's Person of the Year. In 2012 a 15-year-old Pakistani girl was shot in the face by Taliban gunman for protesting the right for women to be educated in her country. Malala Yousafzai survived and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 for her work in education activism. And I would be remiss not to uphold the amazing women of the Ukraine. The women who have taken up arms against tyranny. The women who have sent their children alone over international borders in acts of selfless love so that they may have a chance of a

better life. No one expected Mamie to change things. No one expected Tarana to rock the boat. No one expected Malala to do anything. But guess what? They did. They took up their respective tent pegs and went to work on the oppression and injustices that still plague our world. They did God's work. God called them.

And to be clear, God works just as equally in men too. Men that are beautiful and broken. Men that are thought of as less than. Men that are seen as weak or poor or even criminal. Men that despite these things go on to do incredible, holy acts. But we talk about men all the time. We live in a world that talks about men. So today, today it's about the women. It is about the women who have changed history. The women who have risen above their station in life to do something absolutely amazing for the glory of God. Today it's about the ordinary women who answered the call and did extraordinary things despite being underestimated and undervalued.

So church, never underestimate a woman on a mission. Never underestimate a woman called by God. And when you leave today, remember Jael. Remember the few, short verses about her. Remember who she was, what she did, and why she did it because there are Jaels everywhere among us if we just pay attention. Women who are doing incredible, amazing things in a world stacked against them and in systems that continue to oppress them. Maybe it's in the boardroom. Maybe it's in their own homes. Maybe it's in the classroom or newsroom or operating room or maybe, just maybe, it's in the pulpit. To God be the Glory. Amen.