

Psalm 119:105

“A Light to our Path”

Mother's Day is that one day in the year when we honor and celebrate those ladies in our lives who are the very embodiment of all that is gracious and good. Friday, my father sent me the story of Rachel, who was walking with Jackie, her four-year-old daughter. Jackie picked something up off the ground and started to put it in her mouth. Rachel asked her not to do that. "Why, Mommy?" came the reply. "Because it's been lying outside and it is dirty," said Rachel gently.

Jackie looked at her mother with admiration and asked, "How do you know stuff like that?" Thinking quickly, Rachel responded, "It's in the Mommy Test. You have to know it, or they don't let you be a mommy." Mother and daughter strolled along in silence as Jackie pondered this new information. "I get it!" beamed Jackie with realization. "If you flunk the test, you have to be the Daddy."

Sorry I couldn't resist! But today is that day when we honor not only our Mothers but all the special women – mothers, grandmothers, aunts, godmothers, sisters, teachers and friends – who helped make us who we are? All the women who have been a light to our paths. Those who have taught us the valuable lessons of wisdom, courage and the importance of standing up for ourselves. Which is why I want to reflect today on a story from the Old Testament that about a remarkable woman that few of us have ever heard of. But first, a little background.

If you read the history of the Kings of Israel, you will find that the description of most of them begins with these words. “And King Azariah or Pekah or Manasseh or whoever . . . reigned over Israel and he did what was *evil* in the sight of the LORD, as his ancestors had

done.” With a few exceptions, they seem to be a bloodthirsty, rebellious lot who were intent on disobeying God and all of God’s commandments.

King Manasseh is considered the most wicked King of all, even sacrificing his own son and having the Prophet Isaiah sawn in two. His remaining son, Amon, inherited the crown and continued to lead the people in the worship of idols and the practices of sexual immorality. But after only two years, Amon was killed, and his son Josiah became king at the age of only eight.

Josiah was one of the exceptions. When Josiah was old enough to govern, he realized that he had inherited a kingdom in which even the *servants of God* had become wicked. Corruption among the priests and Temple practices were rampant. In an effort to reform the country, Josiah asked the high priest, Hilkiah, to go to the Temple and count the money that was in the Temple treasury and divide it among ALL the workers in the Temple, not just the priests! During this process, Hilkiah discovered a portion of the Law. Today, we know that it was what we call the book of Deuteronomy, which contains the Ten Commandments given to Moses along with the rest of the Law.

Ultimately, the scroll was read out loud to King Josiah, who tore his garments in grief over how far his people had gone away from their covenant with God. He then instructed the priest and his court to seek wisdom about what to do with the rediscovered Law. They immediately decided to consult the prophetess Huldah. So, listen to Huldah’s response, found in

2 Kings 22:15-20

God gave Huldah a two-fold response to Josiah’s situation, which are the words that we just heard. And on this special day, let’s take time reflect on the wisdom, courage and leadership that Huldah displayed that are similar to the women who have been a light to us over the years.

Women who have who have walked our journeys and taught us the lessons of love, faith and grace.

First, God promised that the Israelites would be judged for their years of wickedness, even though He still loved them. Knowing that we still live in a world where much evil reigns, this is an important part of the story for us to consider. God basically says because Judah has forsaken Him, they will be punished. Huldah explains that no repentance, no reform will stop the impending doom for Judah. Any good parent will try to teach their children that our actions have consequences. And god is no exception. And Huldah's words had a huge impact, not only on the King, but on the entire kingdom.

You see, Josiah knew that Huldah had been called by God to interpret God's word. He went on to establish a nationwide reform that would earn him the fame of being the most effective King in the divided kingdom. He called all the people of Judah to come to the city gates where the Law was read aloud. He then made a covenant with Yahweh in front of all the people that God's Law would be their rule, and all the people joined him in worship to God.

In addition, he got rid of all the idols that had been built throughout the land to worship the gods of sun, moon, and stars. He destroyed the images that had been built at the gates of the Temple to honor other gods. He removed the shrines in the high places that had been built in the cities of Samaria. He reinstated the celebration of the Passover, long forgotten by the children of Israel.

And it as all because of the guidance of a woman. Knowing the complete lack of status of women in Biblical times, this is remarkable! But today, as we celebrate mothers and other women who have guided our lives and helped shape us into the people that we are, we should not

be so surprised. As we look at some of Huldah's qualities, see if they bring to mind anyone that has been important in your life that you might want to reach out to today.

First, Huldah was trusted for her wisdom. When five men, including the high priest and the Temple Scribe, were asked to seek wisdom, they chose to go to Huldah. Huldah is called a prophetess in the Scriptures, meaning that she was singled out by God, divinely recruited to speak God's truth. And she willingly shared her wisdom.

Now in the list of "things my mama told me", we can all be thankful for the wisdom that we have learned. Sage advice like: "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all. Pretty is as pretty does. Mind your manners. Call or text me when you get there. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Were you born in a barn? Wash your hands. Look both ways before you cross the street! If all your friends jumped off a cliff, would you jump too? Because I'm the mother and I said so." And of course, the classic – "be sure you have on clean underwear."

Huldah's wisdom and her gift of interpreting God's word for the truths that God's people needed to hear was a trait that made her one to be admired. By the fact that Huldah says, "Thus says the Lord" four times, we know that she was guided by the Spirit of God to share her interpretations of the Scriptures. Just as we have been blessed by Godly women that have been placed in our lives, King Josiah knew he could listen to and trust the wisdom of Huldah.

Huldah was also courageous. This is evident because she was willing to speak the truth, even though she knew the people would not want to hear it. Huldah spoke out against the popularity of idols and other behaviors that had become commonplace among her people. Of course, it is always easier to go along with the crowd, but when we have people in our lives who will speak the truth in love, it makes us better people and stronger Christians.

Huldah was the ancestral mother to Rosa Parks who would not give up her seat on the bus because she was black. She was the predecessor of Malala Yousafzai, the young Pakistani advocate for the education of women and the youngest person to ever win the Nobel Peace Prize. After she was shot in the face for her activism, she still went on to say publicly, “One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world.”

Huldah set the example for the women who joined the “Me Too” movement and the mother who insists that her child be tested for learning disabilities when no one thinks he should be and the grandmother who is raising her grandchildren so her daughter can seek rehabilitation from drugs. Huldah is every woman we are grateful for who has taught all of us – men and women, boys and girls - to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves.

Now, I imagine the women that come to your mind who have taught you wisdom and courage will not be written up in history books. After all, Huldah only got these few verses even though she shaped an entire kingdom. However, if you are like me, the women that you would pay tribute to today shared lessons that may seem small but were a very bright light on your path.

I grew up with all boy cousins. Each summer, I would go to my grandparents’ farm and spend two weeks or so living the simple life of a farmer and his busy wife and loving every minute of it. Eating strawberries right from the vine. Being sung to sleep by the crickets in a house with no air-conditioning. Learning to make change in my granddaddy’s general store when a rare customer paid with cash and not on credit.

One summer four of my cousins, all brothers, came to spend a few days too, and we would spend hours outside playing hide and go seek and shooting walnuts out of the tree. When my grandparents finally added a bathroom onto the house, they put a window right beside the

toilet because the room was above the cellar and too high for anyone to look in. But each time I went to use the restroom, my cousins would drag some nearby cinderblocks to the window, stack them on top of each other on the cellar door, and soon their faces would appear at the screen. Of course, I started to scream and call for help. I will never forget the response of my grandmother who was busy making biscuits, washing clothes, shelling butter beans and about 5 other things.

She said, “Julie, I don’t have time for this nonsense. You will have to teach them a lesson yourself.” She then gave me a pot of water and told me to take it to the bathroom. The next time those four faces appeared in the screen they got cold water in their faces and never bothered me again! Oh, the wisdom of a busy woman.

But Huldah was not all gloom and doom. As I said earlier, she also delivered a second message - a word of hope. She proclaimed that, because Josiah understood the reasons for God’s anger and was determined to change the ways of the people, God would keep him from witnessing the disaster that was inevitable. True to God’s promise and Huldah’s words, Josiah lived a life of peace and his kingdom did as well. Destruction and Exile did not come until after his death. So, the story of Josiah gives us hope for humanity.

And hope is what we need when we face the warfare, homelessness, oppression, hunger, injustice and even death that seem to carry the day – not just in the world but right here in the upstate. And as 21<sup>st</sup> Christians, we can hold on to the hope of Eternal life given freely to us by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, our Savior. This is the greatest hope for humanity.

But we also need hope when we fall on the playground or fail the driver’s or don’t make the team or the test comes back positive or our son’s marriage fails. And just as Huldah gave Josiah a future with hope, so we have learned from the wise and courageous women in our lives that tomorrow will be a new day because we are loved by a God of grace. In other words, even

in the midst of hopelessness, God does not forsake us or want us to give up on the promise of better times. Or to use the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., “We must accept finite disappointment but never lose infinite hope.”

So, let us all give thanks for the women who have become a light unto our path. Women who have shared their wisdom, courage and leadership and by their example and faith in God taught us to hold on to hope, even when it seems fleeting. In The Message, Eugene Peterson writes the verse from the Psalm we heard this way: “By your words I can see where I’m going; they throw a beam of light on my dark path.” Thanks be to God for those that we know and those we don’t know but admire from the pages of history who have given us light. Light that is a reflection of God’s love and salvation through Christ Jesus. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.