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Let Wisdom *Speak*

Lent 2022



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Shupikai, a farmer who works with All We Can's local partner HEFO, in Nkayi, Zimbabwe.

Read Shupikai's story on p10.

Photo: Tendai Marima/ All We Can.



Stronger Together

07.03.22
Wisdom reflection

Revd Dr Kate Coleman, founding director of Next Leadership and Revd Cham Kaur-Mann, co-director of Next Leadership.

'The daughters of Zelophehad son of Heber, the son of Gilead, the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh, belonged to the clans of Manasseh son of Joseph.'
Numbers 27: 1

Throughout the course of our work and ministry, we are privileged to interact with extraordinary leaders like the ones mentioned in Numbers 27:1-8. And, of course, Zelophehad's daughters are leaders because they did what leaders do, they changed the status quo! Yet their story is relatively unknown...

A few years ago, we watched an amazing film called Hidden Figures. It tells the real-life story of African American women mathematicians/ computers who play a vital role in the NASA space programme of the 1960s. The film focuses on how they made significant contributions while simultaneously overcoming barriers of race and gender. It was clear that they supported and cheered one another on in the process. It's an amazing and inspiring watch and if you haven't done so, do try and watch it with your friends or family!

Hidden Figures resonates with the story of the Daughters of Zelophehad, first mentioned in Numbers 27, who were hidden and unknown. In one sense this is hardly surprising as women in Old (and New) Testament cultures were seldom promoted and generally 'sentenced' to invisibility and life in the shadows.

There are many cultures and subcultures today that continue to hold the belief that women and girls are best kept hidden. However, when the gifts of women and girls do emerge their contributions are often transformative.

'Hidden Figures' such as Zelophehad's Daughters are a reminder that when we, as women, work effectively together, we are 'innovative' and do things that have never been done before. We are also 'unconventional' and do things in ways others would never expect. In addition, these empowering sisters remind us that we are stronger together.

Both Cham and I (Kate) know that neither of us would be here today if it wasn't for each other, the people we have around us and the people God has placed along our individual life journeys. There are opportunities we would have missed; challenges we might not have faced and decisions we wouldn't have taken if it hadn't been for these people.

In this story, all five sisters presented themselves to Moses at the Tent of Meeting to plead their case. It takes great courage to stand before the gatekeepers of historic traditions as they did to propose alternative ways forward.

Women who lead either on purpose or even by 'accident' can transform life for all those who follow. In this, as always, we will be stronger together just like the Daughters of Zelophehad!

Big dreams

Shupikai lives in Nkayi, Zimbabwe. Nkayi is a dry, rural district that has faced big challenges due to the climate crisis. Shupikai shares how joining HEFO's agriculture and farming project has changed her circumstances. HEFO (Health Education Food Organisation) are All We Can's local partner working with communities like Nkayi to develop sustainable farming practices.

'When my husband died in 2016, I felt like I was nowhere. I almost went a little mad and it was a tough time for me, but I met other women from the Rural Women's Assembly (a local group) who told me about HEFO. I started learning about farming through HEFO, I started digging holes in the ground, I've dug all around my plot and although water is a challenge in this area, people still encouraged me to continue. The type of holes I'm digging help to retain more water so I've been able to grow small grains like sorghum and rapoko and these things have given me money to look after my children...

'I saw changes in my life from the time I started participating in HEFO's program, I'm not even looking for a man to come and uplift me in life, I'm already doing it with HEFO's help. I don't worry about next term's fees or other extras we may need in life. I really thank HEFO for their assistance because I never would have made it. I was alone here in this village without many relatives but these people from HEFO were my support...

'My dreams are to have a big harvest and with God's help I will have enough money to start digging contour ridges so I can create an irrigation system...It pains me to see it raining and water just flows past my house, I could catch that water and do something with it.

'I have a wish to uplift my children so they do better in life, it's a big dream but I think I can do it'

International Women's Day is celebrated on 8 March. How can you celebrate and uplift the women in your life and community?

Join All We Can's International Women's Day Zoom event, Tuesday 8th March at 7pm. Sign up for your place at allwecan.org.uk/lentgroup



The importance of stories and why it is time to tell hers

Rachel Allison, is the Helen Kim Memorial Scholar for the Europe - Britain and Ireland Area of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women (2016-21).

The Bible is full of amazing stories and Jesus used stories/parables to explain God's vision for the world and teach us how to live our lives. We tell stories and fairy tales to children to teach them morals, we tell ourselves stories to explain history and politicians, advertisers and many others use narratives and stories to convince us of a whole host of things.

Put simply, stories are vital to how we learn and how we perceive the world.

It is therefore frustrating when you don't see yourself reflected in these stories. It sometimes feels like women were created in the 1800s or else were just extras in the great history of man. Even today the stories of women are overlooked, dismissed, undervalued and cut short by sexism, misogyny and Gender Based Violence. We see this time and time again in the Bible or in the way we tell it. Women being abused, ignored and overlooked for the part they played in the greatest story ever told.

This is not God's plan, or the way God views the world, this is something put in place by centuries of discrimination against women. Yet, if we look behind the narrative we have always been told we see some incredible women. We find the first evangelist speaking to Jesus at the well, the women who stand by Jesus right to the very end, the first people to know of the miracle of the resurrection, we find Esther saving the Jewish people from genocide, and Rizpa standing up for the rights and dignity of the dead. And even behind the stories we

find where women are hurt and abused we also find God is the stillness telling them that they are seen, they are known, and they are loved.

As Christians we too often shy away from the stories of women in the Bible, scared of what they say or just read them through the patriarchal lens in which they are written, but if we continue to do this we will silence not only those women in the Bible but also the women in our pews. If all we talk about are the polite obliging women in the Bible as background characters, what example do we set for women in the church and the girls growing up and learning their moral code from church and Sunday school? If women can't see themselves and their experiences in the Bible and Christian teaching, they are unlikely to feel comfortable, confident or safe in churches or Christian settings. It is vital that we start to tell the stories of women throughout history, and look beyond the patriarchal narratives we read in the Bible to see the truth that God loves, cares for and values all people including women. God wants everyone to fulfil their true potential in our churches, in our communities and in our world, so let's tell that story.



Leadership means service

Rosemary Cumanzala, Executive Director of Zubo Trust, Zimbabwe.

Zubo Trust is one of All We Can's partners, promoting women advancement in Binga District of Zimbabwe. Binga is one of the least developed districts in Zimbabwe, with women and children being among the poorest of the poor. Women have been excluded in the development realm for many decades.

From Zubo's perspective, 'leadership means service'; service to the neediest in society. As the saying goes, there is always light at the end of the tunnel; so we should hope for the better as we go through these historic experiences in the context of this Covid-19 pandemic.

Life has never been the same. Covid-19 brought new way of life, specifically to rural women. As an organisation spearheading women's economic empowerment, it has been overwhelming to see all the gains made over the past years being reversed by the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic. Saddening to see children seated at home without any more education as online lessons have being a nightmare due to lack of gadgets (computers, laptops) to use.

We are grateful to All We Can for supporting Zubo during the trying times of Covid-19. The support that went towards awareness raising campaigns and PPE brought about high levels of awareness and therefore efforts were made by the community to mitigate the possible impact of the pandemic by observing all the health protocols announced by the Government of Zimbabwe and WHO. Without this support, Covid-19 would have

immensely affected most of the women that we work with. Before our intervention, there was a serious information gap between what Covid-19 is and what the community believed.

During the national lockdown, sharing the word of the Lord in our homes was at the centre stage and that continues, even as restrictions have been lifted in Zimbabwe. Devotion and meditation uplifts one's soul. For the Bible in Psalms Chapter 112 verse 4-7 (Gideon International Version) says: *'Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous. It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice. For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever.'*

As a leader, it is important to be a wise woman. For the Bible again says in Proverbs chapter 14 verse 1(KJV): *'Every wise woman buildeth her house, but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.'*

Leaders should truly believe in God and never lose hope. In conclusion, our request to you as supporters is that you continue to pray for us to stick to our values and vision despite the difficulties encountered.

Look back

'Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.'

James 3: 13

The Bible has plenty to say about faith and works. We cannot have one without the other. Here, in James, we find that wisdom is also linked to action. We demonstrate wisdom through our life, our actions, and with humility.

Where do we begin?

It may feel counter-intuitive but what if we begin by looking back? Much like the famous poem Footprints, we look back at our lives and don't just look for when we were carried but also where we were accompanied. God's presence in the midst of each moment. The beautiful and brutal. The mix of joy and grief being interwoven into one story.

How can we demonstrate wisdom if we do not carry the lessons we are being taught?

We have all experienced so much loss and grief, shifts in circumstances, changes to routines and tasks.

Today, let us prayer for God's wisdom to help us see where God has been present throughout it all.

Loving God, you never leave us. You see each success and each failure. Help us to recognise your presence in all moments of our lives. Help us to look back and collect the wisdom you have been teaching us. Amen.

As you look back, note down where you can see God at work? Where were you accompanied?

You can look back at the history of All We Can and discover more about its roots. Learn more at: allwecan.org.uk/about



Based on Psalm 121

Dear God,
I lift up my eyes,
Drawing them back to focus on you.
I look behind me to see the trail of my life.
Where were you?
I look closely and see the hallmarks of your presence;
Strength, patience, peace, joy,
And comfort.
You watch over me;
Over each step I take.
Where does my help come from?
It comes from you.
You are the same always.
You were with me.
You are with me.
You will be with me forever.
I lift up my eyes to you.

God of Wisdom,
Hear my prayer.
Amen.

*'For wisdom
is more precious
than rubies,
and nothing
you desire
can compare
with her.'*

Proverbs 8: 11



A group of local women head to the solar powered borehole set up by HEFO. Photo: Tendai Marima/ All We Can

All We Can is an international development and emergency relief organisation. Focusing on those in greatest need, it has always been inspired by Christian principles and is an integral part of the Methodist family.

Our purpose

All We Can helps find solutions to poverty by engaging with local people and organisations in some of the world's poorest communities to end the suffering caused by inequality and injustice.

The donations that you make will be put to work improving the lives of some of the world's poorest people, not only helping them to provide for their families' basic needs but helping them to fulfil their God-given potential.

allwecan.org.uk/wisdom

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Every person's potential fulfilled