Thought for the week

Rooted and still as a posture for listening

Deborah is presented to us as a judge and as a prophetess, a wise leader among the people of Israel. Today we might think of leaders in this respect as ministers, elders or bishops. Bishops carry a pastoral staff as a symbol of their leadership. We often think about these shepherd's crooks as symbolic of guiding the people of God, actively rescuing them or protecting them – and these are all important aspects of leadership.

However, a bishop who had received his shepherd's crook from a shepherd in Northumberland once spoke about a very different perspective given to him by this shepherd. The Northumbrian hills can be very open to the elements and therefore often very windy in places. The shepherd spoke of using the crook in that context to be able to remain still and steady in the midst of the winds. There, on the rugged hills, he would plant the end of the staff in the ground and lean on it, giving him some stability and allowing him to stand still as the sheep all gathered around him.

This might be a helpful image as we reflect today, both on the specific character of Deborah and her wisdom and leadership, but also on the importance of standing still, being ready to receive from God, in order to have wisdom. We might feel that being active in God's kingdom involves lots of activity and always being on the move. However, Deborah's model shows that remaining still, listening to God and then sharing or acting on that wisdom can be very powerful. She sits in a consistent place, offering that image of stability in the midst of the chaos and confusion of the Israelites.

We might also think about those who went to Deborah to receive wisdom. They needed to travel to where she was, which meant they needed to put themselves in a position where they were ready to receive: recognising the role of leaders, prophets and those who are among us who have wisdom to share.

How can we prioritise stillness, silence and listening to God? How can we also consider where we might need to position ourselves in order to receive wisdom from God – directly and through others?