

## MORAVIAN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Devotional Paper

October 2020

### WONDER WOMEN-THEN AND NOW

#### Judges Ch 4 v 1-9 and Romans Ch 16 v 1-16

Sr Carol Ackah accepted the invitation to speak at the MWA Day 2020 back in May 2019. Little did she, or any of us, imagine that there would not **be** an MWA Day in 2020 or what a momentous and challenging year 2020 would turn out to be. Sr Carol writes .....

When I was later asked to put together a devotional paper based upon what I had planned to say at Fairfield in April 2020 I, perhaps naively, thought that would be an easy thing to do; after all, the theme 'Wonder Women, Then and Now'-remained the same. That proved not to be the case because, while 'then' may not have changed, the 'now' most certainly has, and our thinking on who actually are the Wonder Women of the here and now, of 2020, has inevitably been shaped by the unique circumstances in which we find ourselves.

One thing that hasn't changed is the challenge presented by the breadth of the theme, because how do we begin to narrow the parameters when there have been and are so many "Wonder Women" and **wonderful** women in our world, our church, and our lives over the centuries? One way of doing so is perhaps to focus upon women of both the past and the present who seem, in various ways, to most closely embody what it is that underpins the aims of your organisation, of the MWA, and the purposes for which you exist. In other words women who have lived out their faith and served in practical ways; women who have taken on responsibilities and shown leadership; women who have fulfilled numerous roles.

We have plenty of examples from scripture; Deborah, who we read about in the book of Judges, introduced to us as a married woman, a wife, a person of faith, used by God to bring his word to his people. Deborah the professional woman, a judge with responsibility for settling disputes. Deborah the leader, who was prepared to step forward when Israel was in decline, who did what women so often do and made herself personally available, not sending someone else to do the job, but getting in there herself.

In the New Testament also we encounter so many women who had a strong leadership role, accepting responsibilities in the early church. One such "Wonder Woman" is Priscilla, mentioned no fewer than 5 times in Paul's letters. Priscilla, again a married woman, and very much a team with her husband Aquila, helping him to run their family business. Like Deborah, someone who was prepared to step up to the mark, to get up and go when necessary in the service of the Lord. We meet her in places as diverse as Corinth, Rome and Ephesus, a leader in her own right but also again doing what women often do so well, working away in the background, supporting others when that is what is required to optimise the position. Priscilla adopted a strategy of teaching and then promoting Apollos, who was thus to become one of the most eloquent preachers in bringing Christ's message to the Jews.

Those themes of women who were prepared to get up and go wherever was necessary in Christ's service and to serve others, of women who were willing to take a lead when necessary, but who could play a supporting role when that was the best way to get the job done, continue through the lives of the Wonder Women of our own Moravian Church over the centuries. Women such as Maria Hartmann come to mind; a young German Moravian who in 1859 at the age of 21 got a call from the Unity Mission Board to serve in Tibet. It's hard to imagine just how daunting travel to Tibet must have been for a young single woman in the 1850s, but Maria went on to spend 43 years in the Himalayas alongside her husband the missionary Wilhelm Heyde. She was a wife and mother, a teacher and a translator. Only

3 of her 8 children survived and even they were in a way lost to her as they were sent home to Germany and she did not see them for nearly 30 years.

In 1930 Mary Shawe, the daughter of Moravian missionary parents, who was educated at Fulneck and qualified as a doctor went to Leh to carry on her late fathers' work at the hospital there. In 1936 she married fellow missionary Norman Driver, had 2 children and despite advancing ill health-she had MS -combined running the hospital with missionary tours to the villages of the region, preaching as well as healing, surviving war time atrocities and deprivation before returning to the UK in 1952.

Missionary wives over the centuries also, some of them known to us personally, playing vital supporting roles. Wonder Women all of them, combining family roles, professional lives, serving the Lord and their neighbours in so many ways.

Wonder Women "then", in the past, but what about the here and "now"?

If I had been speaking at the MWA Day in April I'm sure I would have been saying something about our very own Wonder Women in the church today, those in leadership positions as well as those who are the backbone of so many congregations and organisations. I'm sure I would have also acknowledged that **all** women are, and always have been "Wonder Women" in one way or another. I might have been tempted though to spend some time on the big names, the politicians, the climate campaigners, the CEOs of FTSE 500 companies. Writing today in the (almost) Autumn of 2020, still in the midst of a global pandemic, having experienced months of "lockdown", reeling from the death toll statistics I know with certainty who history will judge to be the Wonder Women of our era. Of course some high profile women are quite rightly regarded as wonderful. I'm sure we have all enjoyed noting that the countries which have managed the Covid 19 crisis best, New Zealand, Denmark, Germany, Taiwan, have been countries led by women, but while Jacinda Ardern and Angela Merkel are undoubtedly wonderful they are only a few among the many, usually unnamed who have proven themselves to be Wonder Women. Here in the UK the selfless workers in care homes who left their own homes and families for months on end and moved into their places of work to protect their residents; the doctors, nurses, cleaners of the NHS who risked their own lives to care for patients. The many (nearly always women) sewing scrubs and masks for the NHS when PPE was in short supply. The mothers who proved themselves real Wonder Women taking on home schooling while also trying to earn a living, providing entertainment and diversion for bored offspring, improvising meals when many items (including flour and MacDonalds!) were unavailable. The list is endless.

The Wonder Woman movie-on which I like to think your theme for 2020 was based- depicts a female heroine who sets out to be the champion of humanity, to do good in an uncertain and sometimes evil world, to wage war on wrongs. Essentially that is exactly what all Wonder Women then and now have done and will continue to do. We thank God for them, the unsung heroines as well as the big names of the Bible, of the Church, of our communities and society. The women who have helped to make the world go round and have improved the lot of others while serving the Lord, sharing His Word and His Gospel of love.

Carol Ackah

Related readings: Judges 4 vs 1-9; Romans 16 vs 1-16