**August 23, 2020 Exodus 1:8-2:10**

***Unwelcomed News***

**Scripture: Exodus 1:8-2:10 NRSV**

*(8)Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.  (9)He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. (10)Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." (11)Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. (12)But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. (13)The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, (14)and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them. (15)The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, (16)"When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." (17)But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. (18)So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" (19)The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." (20)So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. (21)And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. (22) Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live." (2:1)Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. (2)The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. (3)When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. (4)His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. (5)The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. (6)When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. (7)Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" (8)Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. (9)Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. (10)When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."*

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**Notes:**

1. A new chapter in the story is ***beginning***.
   1. Joseph, at the ***urging*** of the Pharaoh, moved his entire reunited family to Egypt.
   2. Pharaoh knew, they would gain power and property; from honored ***guests*** to a perceived as a threat.
   3. Pharaoh devised a plan; no more ***Hebrew*** boys.
2. Five women misbehaved in quiet, yet ***subversive*** ways.
   1. Each different, yet the ***same***, each said no.
   2. Shiphrah and Puah told a ridiculous ***story*** for Pharaoh.
   3. They chose to say yes to ushering in new ***lives***.
   4. Jocheved had ***courage***, to nurture the child within her.
   5. Miriam noticed her mother’s tears; that gave her ***courage***.
   6. The ***princess*** of Egypt, knew the baby was Hebrew.
   7. The princess of Egypt opened the basket to find a child; and ***gathered*** him up in her arms.
3. God, is ***delivering*** His people from oppression and death.
   1. Starting with five women, ***low*** on the social ladder.
   2. The work of God is always underway, and happens through the ***faithful***, ***subversive*** acts of insignificant people.
4. We have the ***power*** to raise our hands in the service of God.
   1. The kingdom of God is ushered in by the meek; through quiet, ***subversive*** acts of faith
   2. Have the ***courage*** and boldness to take such a ***risk***.
   3. Citizens are remembered for the ***risks*** they take, and the lives they ***change***.

**Script:**

Have you ever received unwelcomed news? Jan and I were sitting around the fire the other night, talking about the time we received some unwelcome news. We had been married almost two years, and we were just starting to make plans to build our home. We had paid off our student loans, we had looked at the log kits, and we were on our way to start looking into the financing. Sheldon was a year old and we were going to wait until after we had the house completed, to begin thinking of having another child. And that is Jan shared with me that we were expecting another child. That is right, Shane was to born sometime after the construction and completion of our home; But instead, he was coming in the spring of 1997. I say this is unwelcomed news, because this was not in our plans for the year to come. This wasn’t supposed to take place until the house was finished; it was not the news we wanted at that time in our lives.

Have you ever had some unwelcomed news? Have you ever had your plans disrupted by events that you were not expecting? Were your plans ever changed because of some injury, illness, or unexpected event? We all have had our plans disrupted by some unwelcomed news.

Today in our sermon passage, we hear about some unwelcome news, and though it was not planned, it was not expected, nor was it desired. We find today a change in the story of God’s people. The plans that were made are being changed by some unforeseen events, and we find at least five women who needed to do the right thing in order for God’s will to be done? Turn with me to the book of Exodus chapter 1 verse 8 through chapter 2 verse 10.

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A new chapter in the story is beginning. We can tell by the writer’s choice of words: “Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who didn’t know Joseph….” Abraham’s descendants, had settled in the land of Egypt during a terrible famine. Joseph was sold into slavery when the family lived in Canaan, and through a series of events worked his way into the highest office in the land. After he created a system for stockpiling and distributing food during the famine, word spread through all the land that there was food to be had in Egypt. Joseph’s family hadn’t seen him for years—they thought he was dead; so imagine their surprise when the famine forced them to go to Egypt looking for food, and their they run into Joseph.

Between then and now in our story, Joseph—at the urging of the Pharaoh—moved his entire reunited family to Egypt, where he was a highly respected government official. And life was sweet. The family flourished; everything God promised Abraham when he heard God’s voice, the things God promised descendants as numerous as the stars had finally come to be.

But a new day is dawning; the words seem ominous in the beginning of the story: “Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who didn’t know Joseph….” Four hundred years had passed; generations had come and gone; Joseph had been a prominent figure in Egyptian leadership, but that was then and this was now. Joseph’s family has grown large and numerous retaining their identity as a separate people.

By this time the Hebrews had been relegated to a different stratum of society, they were slaves forced into working to support Pharaoh’s building plans. But they were also steadily growing and amassing more of a presence in the land; and Pharaoh was starting to worry about their numbers and their loyalty. If the community of the Hebrews kept growing, Pharaoh knew, soon they would be amassing power and property; they’d gone from honored guests in the land to what Pharaoh perceived as a threat.

Every good story needs a crisis around which it unfolds, and this was it. Pharaoh was worried about the growing influence of the Hebrews, so he devised a plan of showing control, some may even call it genocide. No more Hebrew boys, he declared. They would die at birth until the Egyptians could get this threat under control until they could keep the Hebrews contained. It was a horrible plan and a horrible turn of events for the Hebrew people.

And this is where we meet the five women who receive unwelcomed news; five women who do the right thing. These women risked life and death in order to do the right thing, two of these women are Hebrew midwives; another Hebrew woman is the mother of Moses, Jocheved; and there is Moses’ older sister, Miriam; And finally we find the only Egyptian in this story; a princess, Pharaoh’s daughter.

Five women marginalized automatically by their gender; they are not critical for the history of a people; not significant in the least. It’s a curious way to begin the great epic story of the exodus. Strange, in fact, that we usually tell it from the perspective of Moses, An innocent little baby floating down the Nile river grows up to lead his people to freedom.

But before Moses was ever born or ever emerged from that basket of bull rushes, there were five women who chose to disobey, who chose to misbehave in quiet yet subversive ways, that set into motion the very possibility for the exodus; for salvation; for life. They were not great historic figures with prominent positions and lots of power. They were simply women who saw injustice and oppression and said in whatever way they could: no.

Have you ever heard their names? Would you recognize then if I called them out? Let’s begin with Shiphrah and Puah. They are not usually listed in the top ten biblical characters of the Old Testament. Most of us have never even hear their names. In fact we do not know if they were even Hebrews. But what we do know is what their occupation was, they were midwives. Midwives were women who were trained to care for and deliver babies. In this particular case, they were caring for Hebrew women who were pregnant, and care for the babies til the mother recovered enough to care for the newborn. In every society there are women who take this role; accompanying a woman through the intense labor of delivering a baby, work that was for most of human history a remote mystery to men. These women specialized in the reproductive issues of the Hebrew women; they advised on pregnancy problems; they mopped sweaty brows; they caught babies and cut cords and stopped bleeding. They were there at the very beginning of many little lives.

Pharaoh knew this, of course, and came up with an idea. it would be quick and undetected to stop the lives of the Hebrews right where it started, so he ordered the two midwives to kill any male babies born to Hebrew women. When the baby is delivered, in other words, get rid of it if it’s a boy, abort the child. It was a simple plan, in Pharaoh’s mind, it would not be too complicated to enact. And so he gave the order to the midwives, washed his hands of the situation, and went back to dreaming big plans for the building of Egypt.

Next we hear of an unnamed woman who we find later is named Jocheved. Jocheved, a Hebrew woman and mother to at least two children; Miriam and Aaron. It was in this murderous climate that she found herself pregnant, having a child. Who knows what her thoughts were being pregnant in Egypt at that time? Maybe she didn’t have a choice; maybe she couldn’t bear the thought of making any other decision. She found herself delivering of a baby boy—and she knew what that meant. Death!!!

The fourth woman of our passage today isn’t a woman at all—she was just a little girl. And her childhood is colored by the danger and violence of the Pharaoh’s policy; the slavery of her people; the wrenching grief of her mother. She wasn’t that old, but she was old enough to know what was happening. She was old enough to be part in her mother’s attempts to save her baby brother.

Finally, the fifth woman in our passage is of the most elite class in the land. She was the very daughter of the Pharaoh, great monarch of Egypt. She lived in the lap of luxury, anything she desired was at her disposal, endless servants to meet her every need. She was not preoccupied with thoughts of slavery or genocide or oppression or racism. She was simply bathing in a shallow pool by the Nile, tending to the rigors of monarchy.

Each of these women were different, yet they were all the same, each in their own quiet way put up a hand in the face of all the violence and death and injustice going on around them and said no. Remember? Shiphrah and Puah concocted the most ridiculous story for the Pharaoh… “You know those Hebrew women! They are so hardy that, no matter how fast we hurry, we can never get to them before their babies are born!” Pharaoh, who had had a plan to trick the Hebrew women into thinking their babies were born dead, was stumped. What did he know about giving birth? It seems a funny to us now, but think what it must have felt like for Shiphrah and Puah. Trembling and fearful they must have been, going before supreme Pharaoh with their fabricated excuse for not following his orders? Surely they knew that with the flick of his wrist he could send them to their deaths. But they chose to say no to his plan of death and destruction and yes to the task they had been given: ushering new lives into the world.

And what about Jocheved? She was already a mother, maybe it was that experience that made her feel determined to carry another baby to term. Maybe she didn’t have the option to end her pregnancy. It must have taken courage, to nurture the child growing within her; to make sure he had the nourishment he needed; to take a pregnancy to full term feeling the eyes of everyone on her wondering: what will she do if it’s a boy? Then imagine the courage to labor through his birth and receive the crushing news; that her littlest one was, in fact, a boy. And he would die. I wonder the fear she wrestled with as she defied Pharaoh and hid her tiny infant, doing whatever it would take to keep him safe and not imagining what long-term solution she could manufacture to save his life; then going about her business, caring for her family, doing what needed to be done?

And watching her closely was the infant’s sister Miriam. Old enough to know a little but I am not sure she would be old enough to understand. Who knows what she thought as she watched her mother, weaving the pliant bull rushes together, covering them with tar sealing out water. Did Miriam notice her mother’s tears? Likely. Maybe they were what gave her courage when her mother told her to place the basket in the Nile, courage to run along the riverbank, keeping the bobbing basket in her sight, ready to jump in at even a hint of tipping. Can you imagine the trembling fear that might have overtaken her when she stumbled upon the Pharaoh’s daughter, bathing in the pool on the riverbank? And the fear she felt when she as her little brother floating to the princess? courage for a little Hebrew slave girl to speak up and suggest her mother, of all people, as a nursemaid for the found baby?

Finally the fifth woman… the princess of Egypt. How could she not have known of her father’s order to kill the infant boys. She knew of the genocide, of the Pharaoh’s new law. She also knew immediately when she saw the baby that he was a Hebrew child. She was a woman of privilege, under no obligation to even notice the basket that floated toward her. She certainly could have passed it along to one of her maids, she wouldn’t have even had to participate in her father’s horrid policy, if she found it distasteful at all. Yet she saw the basket and had her maid fetch it; opened it to find a crying child, and she gathered him up in her arms knowing everything that she knew about him and his sure fate, and the mercy of her father’s policies; and she saved him. She used her power and her position to save him.

Yes, today we enter into a new chapter in the story of God’s love and the descendants of Abraham. Perhaps one of the most compelling and riveting part of our story, the story of exodus. God, stepping into history and delivering God’s people from oppression and death. But the story doesn’t begin with a big thunderclap and lightning or a booming voice from heaven. Nope, it starts with five women, low on the social ladder to be sure; some of them even slave women. For the most part they did not have power; each one of them was a slave to greater powers than their own. And each of them confronted with the very crisis that builds to exodus: oppression, enslavement, death. Why would the sweeping epic of the most notable theme in all of scripture: exodus, swing into gear with five insignificant women; why not start with powerful armies and great war lords.

The story of Exodus starts this way, with the stories of these five unlikely women, because; because, the work of God is always underway, and it happens most often through the faithful, subversive acts of insignificant people. People like Shiphrah and Puah. People like Jocheved and Miriam, even people like the pharaoh’s daughter so insignificant that she isn’t named, and people like you and me.

Look around you. What do you see? Oppression and fear; death and violence; injustice and inequity; that is what I see, all the time… and so do you. You and I may not have the power of Pharaoh. We may not have the resources of a president, even. But we do have the power to raise our little hands in the service of God to say no. No to oppression and death and injustice and exclusion. And yes, yes to a God who offers love and salvation, justice and peace; not just for the important people; But for everyone.

The kingdom of God is ushered in by the meek and lowly; through quiet, subversive acts of faith by little people like us, like you and me. That may be what Jesus is expressing when he askes Simon Peter who he was. Doesn’t seem like too much of a stretch for Peter to stand up and say “you are the Christ, the son of the living God,” does it? But for Peter it was huge. It meant speaking truth to the powers that surrounded him; it meant putting his faith in a man who everyone else thought was crazy.

When Peter declared his courage-filled affirmation of faith, think of the crazy response of Jesus. Jesus said: “I tell you, you are Peter, the rock; and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” Peter’s courageous declaration of faith was followed by Jesus with a wild promise: Peter, you summoned just enough courage to speak what you believe, and you have no idea how your act of courage will change the whole world. And it did.

Do you have the courage and boldness to take such a risk.Do you have the courage to tell others who Jesus is to you? Do you have the courage to share what the Lord has done in your life? Where he has brought you from and how he has changed your life for the better?

Well behaved citizens rarely make history, they’re not remembered for the laws obeyed and the normalcy of their everyday lives. They’re remembered for the risks they take, the rules they bend, and the lives they change. In 2000 years, will someone read a grand story of God’s faithfulness that begins with a little, tiny subversively faithful act, performed by you or me. That is our prayer, to summon the strength and courage to step out on faith and do the right thing even though it may mean risking all that we have. If a story is to be found, I wonder how it will end?.