



The Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost

Sunday, August 23rd, 2020

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Sermon Transcript

God Knows our Hearts, our Souls, and our Potential

Last week we heard the story of Joseph and his multicoloured coat and his 11 brothers who plotted to kill him and ended up selling him into slavery. The story played itself out when the brothers had to go to Egypt to get relief from the famine and discovered that the very person who could help them was the brother that they had betrayed years before. Joseph forgave them and the family of Jacob moved to Egypt where they enjoyed all the benefits of honoured guests. 80 years later, the last verse in Genesis tells us : Joseph died at the age of 110 years and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Now fast forward another 350 yrs as the story continues when a new king arose over Egypt who did not know about Joseph. The original family of "seventy" born to old Jacob had grown by leaps and bounds during their stay in Egypt "so that the land was filled with them." More numerous even than "we are", thought the new Pharaoh. And more powerful, too.

The Hebrew population is growing and It's big enough to make Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, feel threatened and worried that soon these people will be way more numerous than his own. You can go downtown and hear Hebrew as much as you hear Egyptian. So the king enslaved the Hebrews working them hard using them to build up his country and keeping them down and oppressed –in their place..

But his idea backfired. The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites."

Pharaoh comes up then with another highly effective and unspeakably evil plan to control them. He goes after the boys knowing that if you target the males of the people you want to dominate, eventually, you will destroy them

Every Hebrew boy baby that is born, Pharaoh orders his Egyptian citizens, is to be exterminated on sight:

Now the story becomes interesting. The king spoke to the midwives Shiphrah and Puah telling them: "when you deliver the Hebrew women, look at the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him. if it is a girl let her live."

These two brave midwives feared God more than Pharaoh so they defied Pharaoh's orders and allowed the children to live. When Pharaoh discovered that the boy babies were being saved he confronted the women. They risked their lives by saying that the Hebrew women were not like Egyptian women – they were vigorous which explained why they could never get there fast enough to give all those sturdy Hebrew women a hand before their babies just popped out on their own!

Pharaoh's answer to that was: pitch 'em in the Nile.

The River Nile is the longest river in the world, snaking 4,160 miles from Burundi, Africa, to the Mediterranean Sea. And in this beautiful, exotic, life-giving river lives one of the most fearsome creatures in the world -- the Nile crocodile, watching from the shoals ready to spring and devour an unsuspecting animal or human.

It was during this time that Jochebed, a levite, wife of Amram gave birth to a beautiful little boy. She did what she could to hide him for a while, but babies grow. And when she could not hide him anymore, she took a bunch of papyrus, caulked it with the ancient equivalent of Kevlar, and made a snug little ark for her three-month-old son. It is a brilliant act, a symbolic act, designed to save life as well as to bear witness, but an ark can't save a child for long. He has one day, maybe two, before he will die of exposure; one day, maybe two, to live.

Now enters the Pharaoh's daughter, who has come down to the river to bathe and sees the ark floating down the river. Curious, she has her maid fetch it and when she opens the ark she discovers the baby. What do you do with a baby in a basket when you're down in the reeds, at the river's edge, and the parents are nowhere to be found?

The princess knew what her father would have done, or at least what his law decreed. If this was a Hebrew male child - and it was - she was supposed to tip over the basket and let that baby tumble into the water. At the very least, she was supposed to close the lid, give the ark a little push, and send it on down the river presumably to sink and drown the child. . That's what the law required, like it or not. And she was supposed to uphold it. She took pity on the baby and decided to rescue it.

Meanwhile Miriam, the baby's sister who has been watching the ark to keep it safe she steps forward and offers to find a wetnurse for the baby. Pharaoh's daughter gratefully accepts and so Miriam, takes the baby back home to their mother to suckle and rear until he is of age to be returned to the Pharaoh's daughter who adopts him and names him Moses which means "I drew him out of the water"

Five strong women played roles in the saving of this child: Shiprah and Puah, Jochebed, Pharaoh's daughter, and Miriam.

The midwives, Shiprah and Puah refused to kill the newborn Hebrew boys defying Pharaoh because they "feared God".

Mother Jochebed, motivated by faith, put away her fears. Jochebed, whose name means "Jehovah is glory," could think of nothing but protecting her child, God's gift to her. She boldly became a risk taker and went against Pharaoh's killing frenzy.

Pharaoh's daughter, unnamed and unlike her murderous father, is overcome with compassion as she approaches the Nile River for a bath. She takes pity on the child and orders him to be pulled out of the water. She adopts the child as her own, although as a princess, she does not do the actual tending of the baby. He then becomes a prince in the palace.

The child's sister, Miriam, waits and watches the child in the basket from the shadows. At the proper time Miriam steps forward. She offers her own mother, the child's own mother, as a nurse. The arrangement is sealed.

We've met five women of faith, compassion, imagination, and ingenuity who save the child whose name in Hebrew means "I drew him out."

That is how a nation got saved. That is how there ever came to be anything left of the Hebrews down in Egypt before Moses returned to lead them out of exile.

Moses came into a world which didn't have much hope. In his life, a hundred little strands of events came together, eventually making a cable of hope which proved to be strong enough to pull the Hebrew people out of their slavery and propel them into a new world.

How do people like Moses come to pass? One can't explain it totally by the environment. There must have been ten thousand children in the Pharaoh's court that, to all outward appearances, had the same gifts and graces, brilliance and charisma of a Moses. Moreover, history does not produce holiness, God does.

And then there was Peter! This morning's Gospel tells us that when Jesus asked his disciples "who do you think I am" Peter was the one who spoke up and declared that he was the Messiah. That was a heretical remark and there was risk depending on who heard. Peter was stepping up but do you ever wonder why Jesus made him the rock on which he built the church and gave him the keys to the kingdom? He was a simple fisherman, a rather big bumbler. When he made a mistake, he did it so everyone could see and hear it loud and clear. He rarely made little mistakes. His were always the kind everyone could see. And yet Jesus saw his potential.

Moses made his share of mistakes as well including murdering an Egyptian, before God called to him step up to the plate and lead the Hebrews out from under the oppression of the Egyptians.

So two men both with character flaws and human weakness did great things when asked by God.

And five ordinary women who listened to their hearts and did seemingly little things which ultimately led to the nation of Israel being saved.

Most of us probably think of ourselves as ordinary people but by listening to our hearts and that still small inner voice who knows what wonderful work we can do, are doing on behalf of God. God works in mysterious ways – not up to us to understand but it shouldn't stop us from doing good works especially now in a time when people are struggling with life and losing hope. God knows our hearts, God knows our souls, God knows our potential.