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Moses in the Bullrushes

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What if I told you some simple small act of faith this week could change the world? Would you believe? Would you smile politely but secretly scoff? Would you add this to the list of the Pastor's crazy ideas? Do you believe that what you do and say, and how you do so, could make a difference in the world?

This morning is not about an Abraham, Isaac, Jacob or Joseph; not really even about Pharaoh or Moses. This part, is a story of two grandmothers, and two girls, in the reeds at the riverbank. Why the two grandmothers and two girls, because of all the characters they are the only ones who are named.

A long time has passed since the end of Genesis. How long? We do not know, some say 200 years, some 430, the Bible simply says "Long enough that a new Pharaoh arose over Egypt, not remembering Joseph and his saving the world from a seven year long international famine." How long will it take for us to forget this Pandemic and Economic Crisis? This new King looking for power, recognizes that there are people in the world who do not look like us, they speak a different language, have different ancestors, worship God differently. Instead of being tolerant, instead of embracing diversity and learning from one another, this King acts with prejudice, fear. First he enslaves this people, then makes their work more difficult. During this era the Pyramids were built by slaves cementing enormous stone blocks together. Pharaoh increased their workload, taking the binding material out of the cement, we might use gravel they used reeds. But the people seem to just grow stronger and more numerous.

Pharaoh is the foil in this story, and represents a very conflicted figure. Pharaoh claims to be God, so there can be no other god. Pharaoh plots to eliminate the Hebrews by telling the midwives of Egypt, that whenever a baby boy is born, to kill the child and tell the mother it was born dead. We said Pharaoh was a conflicted figure, because the Calling of a Midwife is to help babies be born alive, and he has ordered them to kill. These two grandmothers Shiprah and Puah, do believe in God, and as a simple small act of faith: choose to trust God rather than obeying Pharaoh. While most of us have never before heard the names Shiprah and Puah, without these two grandmothers there would be no Moses, no Exodus, no Israel. When challenged by Pharaoh, they appeal to his prejudices, stating that the Hebrews are animals not like the Egyptian women who are refined, and Hebrew women birth sons before the Midwives even arrive.

Pharaoh then directs the people to murder Hebrew boys. He then goes to the Hebrew parents, telling them to throw their babies into the Nile. Now, while in Genesis "the Waters" were a symbol of Chaos and death, the Egyptians believed the Nile River was the Source of all Life, so how could anyone, especially babies' parents kill their own children by abandoning them in the Source of Life? An unnamed Hebrew couple, of the tribe of the Levites (the Priestly tribe) give birth to an unnamed son, and just as when God formed Creation and called each being "Good" the mother sees "this is a good baby."

After hiding him for 3 months she does what Pharaoh ordered, but with a simple small act of faith. She makes an ARK for her remnant of Life, lining the basket with bitumen, pitch and tar, as protective coating, places her son in the basket and the basket in the water at the reeds, with the baby's older sister watching. The mother did not place her baby anywhere in the river, her choice was to place her baby in the marshy

reeds of the river between where the Hebrews lived and Pharaoh's Palace. A place where someone of Pharaoh's household might find the baby. Her simple small act of faith was to hope for compassion. In this no-man's land between Palace and people, out of sight in the reeds, this 3 month old lay in an ark, an act of desperation for our children: waterproofing a baby in the Nile River! A few months ago it was parents purchasing Kevlar Backpacks for their children; how do we protect children going to school in this virus? Desperate parental acts calling for compassion. My baby will not last more than a few hours in the sun in the River in Egypt, I am doing all I can and I need your compassion.

We said at the outset, this was a story about two girls. Much like the modern Disney phenomenon "FROZEN" you have to chose, which role you want to play whether to be the Big Sister in the story watching out for her baby brother, or the Princess who goes to the river to get pretty and finds the baby. The Princess decides to hide the baby from her father's harshness. Miriam volunteers to be helpful, to find a mother to nurse the baby. Having "drawn the baby out of the water in an act of compassion" she calls the baby "Moses" which is a name that in Hebrew means "drawn out of water in compassion," literally meaning "Mossy," and in Egyptian simply meaning "Son." Just as with Shipprah and Puah, without the small simple acts of compassion and caring by Miriam and the Princess, there would be no Moses, no Exodus, no future for others.

This week, I visited someone who had had a difficult time in the hospital. When she got home, she decided she needed to do something, not because she was angry, but because she wanted to save other people from her experience. She wrote a letter to the Hospital, naming and affirming those who had been kind to her, but also naming those who had been harsh and neglectful of an older woman. Would it do any good? I do not know, but she had concern for others and that we should be treated with compassion and concern.

Another friend shared a story, that I told him I would borrow and recycle. There was a man named Carl who was in his 90s, a WWII Veteran. Carl lived alone and limped because of a bullet wound in the war. Carl volunteered to care for a scrap of ground on the church yard to create a garden. In the heat in the sun, he labored digging in the dirt and watering with a hose, to create beauty for others. One day a gang of punks came down the street toward Carl in his garden. He did not challenge or ignore them, he offered them a cold drink from the hose. Instead they pushed him to the ground, taking his retirement watch and his wallet with the photo of his wife inside. The pastor came running out, but they had already moved on, and Carl got himself to his feet and began putting his tools away.

A few weeks later, the same gang came down the street again. When they stopped at his garden, Carl once again offered them a drink of cold water from the hose. They took the hose and doused him thoroughly. Laughing, they walked away.

Three weeks later, there was a knock at the door of Carl's home. He opened the door to the leader of the gang. He held out a paper bag and said "Here, this stuff is yours." He went on to describe that he could not believe Carl had offered them a drink of cold water when they had abused him, and then he did it again. The man had spent that whole night trying to figure it out. Carl's compassion for them in the midst of their threats and abuse, made no sense. So he had quit the gang and was returning Carl's belongings to him. Inside the bag were Carl's Retirement Watch, and his billfold, with all of the money and the photo of his beloved wife still inside. The young man began attending the church to try to find out why Carl was like this, eventually he got his GED and a good job.

About a year later, Carl died. The young man told his story of Carl at Carl's memorial. And the next day, he showed up at the church asking for the keys to Carl's garden shed, because he needed the tools and hose to care for the garden.

That story moved me, especially because I received a kind story this week from a man searching for character. One Sunday the HS Wrestling Coach came to worship, saying he wanted to know where our son had gotten his character. The Coach had been an All American Football Player and All American in Wrestling, had played professional Football, he was a highly-respected Attorney and Author. He attended faithfully, became an Elder of the Church. His beautiful wife is Jewish. I had the honor of baptizing their five children, where I had asked who is your Lord and Savior, he had said Jesus Christ and she said Adonai. The summer before we came here, I officiated at weddings for two of their children. Some of you commented when we arrived in Green Valley because this Handsome, Successful, Attorney, Football Player had been on 60 Minutes for having ALS Lou Gerrig's disease. He wrote me an email this week to say he watches our worship services on line and he prays for us. He described that "His cup runneth over. The son and wife I had married a year ago, just gave birth to a son, whom they named after their father." He described THAT his condition is only another blessing in a wonderful life. 'I needed to be truly committed to Christ, and ALS has taken away all distractions of the world and the flesh. I am able to focus on my God and my Savior, the angels around me: my wife, kids, grandkids, teachers, coaches and friends. I have been liberated and I have faith that when the time is right, I will be able to walk, talk, eat and drink again. Until then I will be reveling in the abundant blessings all around me.'"

You have the power to change the world with kind words or a simple small act of faith.