

12 Pentecost Yr A, 27/08/2017
Exod 1:8-2:10
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“Five women who saved Moses”

One day political leaders might be your best friends and supporters. The next day they might become your worst enemies and persecute you. Political climates, like the weather, are unpredictable and they can and do change. The Israelites found that out when a new Pharaoh began to rule Egypt. He did not know Joseph and his people, the Israelites. Worse yet for the Israelites this new Pharaoh was fearful of the Israelites. He allowed that fear to control his thoughts and actions. He was afraid that the Israelites would grow in numbers and if there were a war, they would take the side of the enemy and be able to leave Egypt. So his first act is to make the Hebrews slaves and have them work hard to build two supply cities. However the more the Hebrews were oppressed as slaves, the more God allowed them to increase in their numbers. So Pharaoh’s policy of making them slaves to reduce their number was over-ruled by God.

What did Pharaoh do then? Well, instead of trying to befriend the Hebrews he oppressed them even more. He met with two Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, and decreed that when the Hebrew women gave birth to male babies, they should kill them.

Leaders and laws can be unjust, and in their extreme, they can be evil. History has taught us that there are times when the right thing to do is to disobey such leaders and their unjust laws. So what did Shiphrah and Puah do? Well, they did the right thing and disobeyed Pharaoh’s decree. They saved the lives of Hebrew male babies.

When Pharaoh summoned Shiphrah and Puah and asked them why they disobeyed his decree, they out-manuevered him by basically telling him a lie—namely that the Hebrew women gave birth to their babies before the midwives arrived on the scene. When a leader and a law is unjust,

sometimes the right thing to do is to disobey the leader and the law. History abounds with examples of civil disobedience—including faithful Germans who saved the lives of Jews in World War II, faithful white Americans who worked alongside black Americans to put an end to segregation of the races, and faithful white South Africans who worked alongside black South Africans to end apartheid rule.

So with great courage and at the risk of being punished or even losing their own lives; these two Hebrew midwives do the right thing by telling their lie to Pharaoh in order to protect the Hebrew baby boys; and by disobeying his decree they saved many lives.

So Shiphrah and Puah lived up to their names—their names mean “beautiful” and “splendid.” Their civil disobedience was beautiful and splendid in the eyes of the LORD; and God blessed them with families.

After seeing that his decree to the Hebrew midwives was not working; Pharaoh then expands his unjust decree of genocide to all his people. Now all his people are commanded by Pharaoh to kill all Hebrew baby boys by throwing them into the Nile River. If the babies didn’t die by drowning, then hungry crocodiles would kill them.

As the story continues, we are told about the birth of Moses and again two brave women, his mother and his sister. Both Moses’ mother and sister do what they can to save Moses. His mother defies Pharaoh’s genocide decree by hiding her son for three months. After that, she makes a little basket to put him among the reeds along the river bank. I’m sure that Moses’ mother must have agonized over having to give up her beautiful son. She most likely prayed to God that he would spare her son; so that he wouldn’t drown or get eaten by the crocodiles. She probably prayed that some kind person would find her son, spare his life, and raise him as a loving parent.

Moses’ sister too was faithful and did the right thing by watching carefully what was going to happen to her brother. As she was watching,

lo and behold Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe, and she saw the basket and ordered one of her maids to fetch it. When Pharaoh's daughter opened the basket and saw the baby; she, unlike her cruel dad had compassion on this Hebrew baby boy. Before you know it, Moses' sister seizes the day and wisely asks a question that suggests Pharaoh's daughter is going to save her brother. She asks Pharaoh's daughter if she can get a Hebrew wet nurse for her brother. Of course Pharaoh's daughter didn't realise that the wet nurse was going to be Moses' mother (or did she? in which case that would have made her even more courageous and determined to disobey and resist he dad's cruel decree). Moses' sister gets the go-ahead from Pharaoh's daughter, and Moses' mother ends up looking after her son and even getting paid by Pharaoh's daughter for doing so (perhaps another indication that she knew it was Moses' mother, and hence a sign of compassion toward her).

As the story continues, Pharaoh's daughter continues to defy her dad's unjust genocide decree by eventually adopting this Hebrew male child as her son and naming him Moses, meaning to draw out, as a reminder of how she played her part in doing the right thing by saving him at the Nile River.

So, all three of these women, Moses' mother, sister and Pharaoh's daughter were taking huge risks by saving Moses. If Pharaoh would have found out about their saving actions he most likely would have killed Moses' mother and sister along with Moses. He may also have punished his own daughter in some way. Pharaoh's daughter was also at risk when she brought Moses into the same royal palace as the Pharaoh. Yet she does so, and both her and Moses remain alive.

Five brave women who saved the lives of many Hebrew baby boys, including the life of Moses. Just as Pharaoh's daughter drew Moses out of the waters of the Nile River; Moses himself, as God's servant-leader, with God's help, would draw out his own Israelite people from Egyptian

slavery and the waters of the Red Sea. God also draws out you and I from the waters of baptism by uniting us with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; so that in our baptismal covenant we are free to love and serve God and our neighbour like these five brave women and like Moses himself.

God is at work in the lives of five brave women who do the right thing and save lives, including the life of Moses. This story is a powerful one for us today. There are times in our lives when we too are called on by God to obey him by loving those who might be different than ourselves. The other who might have a different colour of skin, and wear strange clothing, and speak another language is not to be feared, or hated, or put to death. Rather, God calls on us to befriend the other who is different than us; to learn more about them; to make them our neighbour and friend rather than see them as a threat and an enemy. Such acts of neighbourliness and friendship are blessed by God and can make a huge difference in the world.