
Sunday 23rd August – The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

Readings: Exodus 1:8-2:10 & Matthew 16:13-20

Exodus 1:8-2:10

Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. 'Look,' he said to his people, 'the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.'

So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labour, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with harsh labour in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labour, the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, 'When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.' The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, 'Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?'

The midwives answered Pharaoh, 'Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.'

So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: 'Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.'

Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river-bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. 'This is one of the Hebrew babies,' she said.

Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?'

'Yes, go,' she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.' So the woman took the baby and nursed him. When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, 'I drew him out of the water.'

Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?'

They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'

'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?'

Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'

Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Reflection

The mother of one of our friends was born and raised in rural Norway. When the Nazis invaded Norway in 1940 she was only 14! What could a young girl do against such an enemy? By 15, she was actively supporting the Resistance! As night fell, she would ski from one valley to another, with guns and ammunition stuffed down her trousers! Had she been caught, the consequences for her whole family would have been massive. But they took a gamble that the Germans wouldn't consider her a risk,

because she was a child. And thus she played her own small part in overthrowing Hitler...

Exodus recounts the bravery of two women who helped defeat another tyrant, Pharaoh. The Hebrew people arrived in Egypt after famine devastated their own land. They stayed, worked and prospered. Egypt was blessed through them. But when the new Pharaoh came to power, he forgot how much Egypt had benefited from their presence. Instead he saw their ever-increasing numbers and felt threatened; Exodus 1:9-10. We may think that tensions caused by mass migration are a modern problem! But they are not! And parallels can be seen in our own nation...

Pharaoh's first tactic was to crush the Hebrews through forced labour; instead they got stronger; Exodus 1:11-12. The irony was, the Egyptians needed the Hebrews to stay! Because Egypt had a programme of massive building projects and the Hebrews made a crucial contribution to their workforce. As a nation, we too rely heavily on migrant workers. They often do the jobs no one else will do. They have been loyal to the UK, yet many people wish to banish them from their homes and livelihoods here.

Pharaoh's second tactic was infanticide. It is incongruous that Pharaoh would even speak to these Hebrew midwives! They were at the bottom of the pecking order. Slaves. Female. Powerless. Why didn't one of his officials handle it? Such was Pharaoh's paranoia; it appears he couldn't trust his own people. Yet he trusted the Israelite midwives to obey him!

Pharaoh is not named, but the midwives are! Another subtle indication that the midwives hold the power; while Pharaoh, for all his wealth and position, does not. Ex 1:15. Pharaoh was determined to wipe out the male line, but the real threat were the women! Not only did the two midwives outwit him; but Moses' mother, sister, and even Pharaoh's daughter, also got the better of him; resulting in Moses being saved and taken into Pharaoh's court! Exodus 2:1-10.

Moses grew up to lead his people out of Egypt into the Promised Land. From Israel came the line of David. And from the line of David, Jesus! We know this, but the midwives didn't! They were just saving one baby at a time, because they knew this was the right thing to do. They didn't know God's purposes and plans, and how their obedience would be part of a long chain of events, that would result not just in saving the Israelites, but ultimately the world! This is mind-boggling!

It's a reminder that God uses ordinary people to achieve amazing things, often by doing very ordinary things! These midwives were just doing their job; doing what they always did, albeit in a potentially dangerous situation. But because they chose to obey God, because they chose to do the right thing, they had an impact that

stretched far beyond their imagination and understanding. What was true for those midwives is also true for us. God can take the ordinary things we do and use them to achieve amazing things. However humble or unimportant our actions may seem, when we step out in obedience, even in the smallest way, God can make something far greater out of it. We may never know the impact of our actions. But this does not mean God isn't at work through them!

One day my art teacher did something very simple. She pinned a leaflet on a noticeboard about a youth camp in Scotland. I signed up. The camp was run by Scripture Union. While I was there, I responded to the Gospel and became a Christian. All Miss Johnson did, was pin a leaflet on a noticeboard! So, don't despise the small things! God works differently to the world. All God needs are people who will listen to him and obey him. He partners his strength with our weakness and does amazing things! Most of the time we will never know what difference we may have made. We just have to trust God that he will, and he does, work through us – insignificant though our efforts may feel!! God is faithful; he does amazing things with all that we offer him. I am certain of it. Amen.

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