

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost  
Year A Proper 16  
Exodus 1:8-2:10, Romans 12:1-8  
August 21, 2011

*In the name of the one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

The book of exodus tells us the story of how the children of Israel were drawn out of bondage in Egypt, how they were saved by their God. And how, as the passage this morning tells us, their salvation was assisted, not in a small way, by a group of five incredible women.

First there were the two midwives, so extraordinary in their ministry that their names were recorded for all time. Shiphrah. Puah. Selfless, god-fearing, brave, clever, a bit cheeky. They were ordered to kill every boy who survived the births they attended. But, having been called vocationally to bring life into the world, they killed no one.

When the king heard of this, he summoned these two extraordinary and defiant women. How they must have trembled in front of Pharaoh. "Why haven't you heeded my commands???" Their answer played on the pharaoh's racism and assumptions. "They are so vigorous those women. They don't need us."

Then there was the mom who refused to adhere to the continued ruthless commands of Pharaoh. Not that any mother could. Kill the baby she loved and labored so hard to bring into the world? No way!

She, too, must have lived in constant fear as she held her crying baby close to her chest, praying that he would be spared, praying that his cries would not reach any of Pharaoh's men.

When she could no longer keep him home, she made him a new one. An ark of sorts. She made him a waterproof basket and sent him down the river with prayers - and faith in a promise made by her God to her people long ago.

The baby's older sister looked over the basket as it floated down the river. She could not abandon her baby brother. She would face whatever fate he befell. She would see him through it. She watched and waited. He rocked gently down the stream.

*Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep.*

Finally, we meet Pharaoh's daughter. A member of the ruling family. As close to the center of the corrupt and ruthless powers as one could get. How was she not tempted? How was she not seduced by the power that drew in her father?

Well, I think we can all take heart knowing God's grace is more powerful than any worldly authority.

When Pharaoh's daughter opened the basket and saw those brown eyes looking up at her she didn't see the eyes of her enemy, she saw a life worth saving.

Scripture says she saw the child, he was crying, and she took pity on him.

Her concern parallels the concern of the God of Abraham, who in the next chapter says, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings."

This woman acts as God will act:

- Seeing the suffering of this baby boy, she takes the time to take note and really see reality as it unfolds.
- Hearing the baby's cry, she shuts out the distracting noises that would prevent her from hearing the cry of the weak and powerless.
- And, pitying the baby boy, she acknowledges the pain in his life.

She sees life worth saving.

We will be hearing the story of Exodus over the next nine weeks as we move into the Fall - as we move towards All Saints Day and the last few weeks before Advent.

Our introduction to the story could not be any more perfect than what we hear today. We are introduced to Moses, who will soon become the focal point for our readings. But before we really hear anything about him, we hear about the incredible women who surrounded him as he came into his life.

Covenanting among themselves, these women go to such extraordinary lengths to redeem this young baby that they in part prefigure the entire story of exodus – a story that demonstrates how God redeems all of God's children and how an entire nation is born of promise. \*

How was it possible that these women were able to save a boy and assist in the birth of a nation?

Perhaps it was because they didn't think of themselves more highly than they ought to have.  
Perhaps it was because, in the face of fear, they took the time to read their situation with sober judgment.  
Perhaps it was because they discerned right action according to the faith given them by God.  
Perhaps it was because they understood that they had unique gifts and offered them according to the grace given them.

To one was given the gift of courage to be defiant in the face of injustice.

To another was given the gift of rhetorical argument.

To another was given the gift of faith and memory.

To another was given the gift of fortitude.

To another was given the gift of compassion.

Five women.

All living sacrifices.

These women who lived so many centuries before Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, help us see, hear and know the hope and expectation Paul outlines - not only for those first Christian communities living in the midst of persecuting Roman authorities - but also for those of us living here today in the midst of a world in which the weak and vulnerable are getting weaker and more vulnerable day by day.

There is famine in East Africa.

Famine.

Death and hunger like we haven't seen for decades. So many women, children and babies dying. We see kids hungry in our own country – one of the wealthiest in the world – while our political leaders vacation in luxury.

We see political brutes killing civilians in countries in North Africa and the Middle East.

We see the oppressed and destitute beginning a new day like their oppressed and destitute grandparents did before them.

And all of these people are part of one humanity. One body. One precious life we all share.

One person, Jesus Christ, died to save us.

We are not called today to give up our lives – to die.

Rather we are called to offer our lives – to live.

So we can live. And others can live. Full, spiritual, whole, dignified lives.

Paul writes, “present your bodies as a *living* sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God...do not be conformed to this world, *but be transformed* by the renewing of your minds”

Paul's bases his requests, his expectations of the community on the fact that they are baptized into Christ's death, burial and resurrection – as are we. Our baptism – and oh how great it would have been to have a baptism today – marks us as Christ's own. We are welcomed into the household of God. We take our place in the Body of Christ and we align ourselves with all who have made sacrifices over the years to see the Kingdom of God come on earth.

We align ourselves with Shiphrah and Puah. Moses's mother and sister. The daughter of Pharaoh.

We offer ourselves and the gifts we have been given on behalf of all creation.

We live fully so others can live fully.

We make sacrifices in that we offer consecrated gifts – our unique gifts made holy by God – to others through the work we do in the church, in our communities, in our world.

Please turn to the lectionary insert included in your bulletin. Read aloud with me the Collect of the Day – the second version printed on the lectionary insert:

Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

\* Thank you Dr. Judy Fentress Williams for the wonderful OT Lectures from which this info came!