

Sermon – July 18, 2021
“Out of the Water”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Exodus 1:15 – 2:10

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them to be a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry here on this mission field. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen

Good morning! Welcome to the hot, hazy days of summer. I hope that we are all beginning to enjoy the fresh produce of summer and, as we do, we are giving thanks to God for bringing adequate rain to sustain the growth and the bounty that is pouring forth. Thanks to everyone who was able to attend the healing service this past Wednesday. We were blessed to have Jesus come and be among us as we prayed for people’s concerns. We will gather again later this summer at Afton for the next healing service, so if you missed this one, don’t be concerned as we are again moving into regular times of coming together and praying for healing on the Charge.

I hope we have begun to open our Bibles this past week and have started to read through Exodus. I can only preach on the highlights of this key Old Testament book, but if we will take time to read it over the weeks that we journey with Israel out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai and beyond, then we will receive a greater blessing. Last week, we left the sons and daughters of Israel in slavery under violent measures put in place by Pharaoh to keep the numbers of Israelites low. We saw God working in the background subverting those measures and blessing Israel with an

increase in their numbers. God's hand may not yet be apparent, but God is at work through the blessing seen in the continued growth of the people of Israel.

This morning I am going to focus on four women God uses to respond to the cries of His people: two midwives, a mother, and an Egyptian princess. Let's follow Pharaoh as he moves forward with a new plan to control the still growing numbers of Israelites in Egypt. Pharaoh does not yet know this God who is blessing Israel and decides that he needs to take new action to achieve his goals. Notice this action is not done in the open, but in secret. Pharaoh's latest plan is to have the Hebrew midwives kill the baby boys as soon as they are born. They are to do this in a manner that appears to be an accident. Pharaoh has tasked those who help bring life with the job of taking life to meet his purposes. Let's look at these scriptures this morning and see what we might learn from these women.

Ladies, imagine that you are midwives and one day you receive a phone call and the voice you hear tells you they are with the White House staff and you are asked to come to a private meeting with the President of the United States. That would be similar to the situation these two midwives find themselves in as they have been brought to hear the leader of the most powerful nation in the world at their time in history. I am not sure that we can imagine the pressure that would occur in such a meeting to agree with any request that might be given. Can we imagine the pressure, fear, and overpowering compulsion to comply with requests that these two humble women encounter in the presence of Pharaoh? This is a secret meeting, a secret assignment for just these women and most likely the other midwives in Egypt they normally work with to bring forth new lives in Hebrew families. Our two midwives go out from the presence of Pharaoh, most likely full of fear, but they fear God more, and so they do not do as they were commanded by Pharaoh; instead, they let the boys live. Notice they don't run down to the Egyptian News Network and put their decision out for everyone to know. Neither do they start riots protesting this command of Pharaoh. They decide they will follow God's creational guidance for life and not Pharaoh's desire for them to bring death, and out of their decision to follow God, they do not comply but let the boys live. We are not sure how long it takes Pharaoh to figure this out, but they are again summoned into his presence and asked why they are not killing the boys. The Hebrew midwives tell him that it is not them but the strength of the Hebrew women that keeps them from complying. By the time they arrive, the moment for them to secretly kill the baby boys and make it seem to be an accident has passed. We are not told in the

scripture what Pharaoh's response to the women is, but we are told that God honors their decision to not follow this command and blesses them with families of their own. That which they were to take away for Pharaoh they are given by God. Their fear of God, and not Pharaoh, brings blessings to them and to the nation of Israel. As a result of their refusal to kill innocent children, they are themselves blessed by God, and the people of Israel multiply and become very strong. Notice that the sons of Israel are saved by the actions of the daughters of Israel. Also, don't miss that their response to a command from an earthly authority is not compliance, but defenseless resistance guided by their understanding of God. God is a God of life, not death, and the midwives' refusal to kill children demonstrates that they grasp the idea that to kill children is not God's will. The continued growth in the numbers of Israelites demonstrates that God's blessing is upon their actions. Pharaoh's evil plan fails and now the people of Israel are very strong. The last thing I will point out this morning is that we know these midwives' names, Shiphrah and Puah. We are not told Pharaoh's name, but these two women are remembered in scripture for all time for their response to this command they have disregarded in fear of God.

Pharaoh must now find a new way to deal with the strength of Israel. He moves openly now, bringing all people of his kingdom into his next action for Hebrew population control. He commands all of his people, Hebrews and Egyptians, that "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live." Pharaoh may think that his struggle is against the people of Israel, but his struggle is against God. The water of the Nile is the source of life for the people of Egypt, but Pharaoh has made it a place of death for Hebrew children. Pharaoh has reached out with his authority to have babies killed in order to stop God's creational focus that brings abundant life for His people. Don't lose sight that it is Pharaoh who decides water will be part of this Exodus story, and we will later see God use water against Pharaoh and his army to defeat them. Pharaoh openly becomes an instrument of death as he seeks to end the lives of the boys. I cannot imagine hearing these words heralded throughout Egypt and the fear and pain they bring to parents. A time of great joy, the birth of a child, has been changed to a time of dread, fear, and sadness. The cry of anguish that must have come from this decree among the people of Israel as they were forced to throw their sons into the Nile and watch them drown would have been overwhelming. Pharaoh is again seeking to limit God's creational work. Pharaoh has placed the people of Egypt on a path that will cost them their first-born sons as the price for the freedom of Israel. The results of this decree may look like a

temporary win for Pharaoh, but in the end, the loss for Egypt will be staggering. Think of these slaves, the people of Israel, who have nowhere to turn to avoid this command and cry out to God for a savior.

God is not done with this situation. When the cost of the lives of His children are involved, God acts. Notice that to this point in our journey, God's hand is still not yet seen. God continues working through His people. The focus of the narrative changes from the people of Israel to a Hebrew mother and father who marry and have a son. We are not at this point told their names, but later in our journey we will learn that their names are Amram and Jochebed. They have a boy born into their house and the boy's mother, Jochebed, sees that he is great. Understanding the Hebrew word in English is difficult, but the point is that this boy child touches his mother's heart and she is willing to resist the decree of Pharaoh to keep him alive as long as she is able. For three months she hides him and then it becomes necessary for her to move forward and take her son to the river. We are not told the consequences for a family that does not comply with the decree, but I think we see that lack of compliance brought devastating results, so that after a point in time, Jochebed has to move forward and comply at some level with the decree.

Don't miss what she does: she makes an ark. Yes, this is the same Hebrew word that is used to describe what Noah built for the flood. This Hebrew word only occurs in two places in the Old Testament: in the flood account found in the book of Genesis and in this instance in Exodus. Notice the mother also smears the sides of her ark with tar as did Noah and that she puts a top on it, also as did Noah. She then places her ark among the reeds and leaves her son there in God's hands. To watch and see what happens would be too painful to witness, but she leaves the baby's sister to watch that they might know the outcome. She has complied with the intent of the decree and placed her son in the Nile in an ark trusting God. She has followed what she knows of God's work through Noah and protected her child with an ark in hopes that God will also remember her child and bear him safely on the waters of the Nile. God is able to work through her actions. Notice the parallels between her yet-to-be-named son and Noah. Both of these men are instruments selected by God to be safely borne on the deadly waters in an ark so that they might avoid the destruction that comes to others and become one through whom God's plan for creation is continued. At this point, we should not only look back to Noah who was brought safely through the flood, but look forward to Israel being brought through the sea to freedom

from Egypt and to become bound to God as His people. And we should not miss the connection in the future to Mary laying her son in a crude manger wondering what her child will be in God's plan. This child's mother now trusts God for the outcome of her actions.

Another woman comes to the Nile, the fourth in our group of women. She is not an Israelite. This woman is the daughter of Pharaoh, a princess. She comes to the river to bathe, to be cleansed by the life-giving waters that her father has sought to make into a place of death. She comes to the waters of the Nile with her attendants and maids. Notice how her actions with the child she finds in the basket parallel the actions of God for His people. She comes down to the Nile, sees the basket, hears the cry of the baby, is moved with pity, draws the baby out of the water, and then provides for his daily needs. Another daughter of Israel is instrumental in the care of this baby boy, his sister. When she sees her brother drawn from the water, she quickly and boldly goes to this princess and offers to find a mother to provide for the needs of the baby. The princess agrees with her suggestion and agrees to pay for the baby's care. This baby boy, pulled from the reeds on the Nile, is returned to his mother who is paid to care for him. This beautiful baby boy who will lead Israel to God is nurtured with his Hebrew family and then brought at some point to Pharaoh's house to live and learn among the Egyptians. This same princess names the baby Moses, a name that means "I have drawn him out of the water." She has given Moses more than a name based on her action; she has given him a name that points to what he will do for the people of Israel. The child, who will grow to be a man in Pharaoh's home, through whom God will save His people, has been pulled from the waters of the Nile.

We should not let the actions of these women go unnoticed as we journey with Israel to the promised land. These women have quietly defied the Pharaoh of Egypt, the leader of the most powerful nation in the world, not by force, cunning, or vengeance, but by being faithful to the God they follow and resisting in the manner they could. We also should not miss that one of the results of the Pharaoh's evil decree to kill the sons of Israel in the Nile has resulted in a Hebrew child being raised in his own home. Nor should we miss that Moses' mother's desire to protect him and have him taken as far from Pharaoh as possible, has resulted in her son living in Pharaoh's house.

Notice that there is an emerging theme in the actions of these women found in Exodus. God works through people as they fear him, seek to be available, trust Him, and act in harmony with His nature. As a parent, I cannot imagine what it would take to place a three-month-old

child in a basket on the waters of a river and trust God to care for him. The actions these women take are not great acts of direct confrontational defiance, but are examples of quiet noncompliance to a wicked decree by seeking to be those who fear God and seek to bring their actions and lives into a harmony with their knowledge of God. The midwives understood that Pharaoh's decree was not consistent with God's creational nature to bring life and they did not comply. Moses' mother understood that Pharaoh's decree to drown her beautiful child was not consistent with God's nature of life, and so she placed Moses in an ark and trusted God. The daughter of the leader of the most powerful nation in the world had pity when she heard the cry of a child and brought him into her home. She was not afraid of being seen doing what she knew to be the right thing even if she did not yet know the Hebrew God. Here in Exodus we have become witnesses to God working through people to stop the advance of evil. In these examples, their actions are against Pharaoh's evil plan against Israel to stop God's creational plan for His people. The actions of these women are the first in a growing response to resist oppression with the end result being Israel's liberation from cruel bondage in Egypt.

Evil is still present with us today and God is still at work through the body of Christ to transform people and bring His kingdom. We are the people of God, the Body of Christ, in the now of this place. Let us also seek to respond as these women did when we are confronted with evil that seeks to prevent God's people from being liberated from the cruelest of bondage, bondage to sin and death. The child Mary placed in a manger, Jesus, has paid the price for all of his people to be released from this bondage. We, as the people of God, are asked to resist evil, follow Jesus, and be the body of Christ, a body that is at work to quietly advance the kingdom of God by acting in harmony with God, loving others, and transforming the world one life at a time.

Pray with me: Lord, come and do a new work in us. Let us be transformed by your steadfast love into your people. Lord, help us to become aware of your will, to conform our lives and actions to your nature that we might identify evil and respond to it with noncompliance and trust in you that salvation may come to others as we seek to love in such a manner. Jesus, lead us to be those who say no to the evil ideas we are confronted with in our lives, and yes to your love. Jesus, teach us to live in this place at this time in harmony with your will. In your name we pray. Amen.