

Exodus 2:1-10

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. 'This must be one of the Hebrews' children,' she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?' Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Yes.' So the girl went and called the child's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.' So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, 'because', she said, 'I drew him out of the water.'

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

“Just Beyond Her Sight”**October 5, 2008****Rev. Pam Everhart**

When my son Jake was about four, he and I went to see an IMAX movie together, and it was about the Nile River, and the film started with a fictional woman putting a baby in a basket and watching the basket float for a period of time down the river, just so you could get an idea of how big and wide that river was, and so they used a familiar story to people of different faiths about Moses. It wasn't a good thing, but my son had just been to vacation Bible school. Normally, that's a good thing, but it wasn't a good thing this day, because my son stood up in his chair at the movie theater, and you know those sort of

make you feel like you're going to tip over, and he started singing at the top of his lungs, "Moses, floating in a basket," this song that they had learned, and so I shoved him down in his chair, like any good mother would do, and said, "Shhh, stop it," and people around me were snickering. I'm sure some people around me were moaning in protest too, but I've since blocked that out.

Moses was floating in a basket, and that song, for obvious reasons, has never left my mind, and it came back to me this week again as I was reading this Scripture, thinking about Moses floating in a basket, drifting down the River Nile. The song continues, "Who will, who will save him? God will save this little child." That's how the song goes. My son can sing it for you if you want to hear it. And it became legend indeed in the Hebrew faith, God saving a special baby, sparing his life for a special purpose. God seeing to it that Moses lives, so that Moses can be a savior to his people, and can guide them into a promised land.

But then I decided to do a little bit more than hang around a vacation Bible school song, as good as it may be, and although as painful as the memories might be, and I stepped into the text, as Eugene Lowry instructed us a couple of weeks ago, and I pondered a little bit more. Who is in this story with Moses in the basket in the River Nile? Who is in this story? Who are the on-the-ground participants in this story? And I discovered that in this story of survival and destiny are women. Women everywhere abound in this story. Women protecting and rescuing, and stepping outside of their expected roles, to save a child, and thought they may not know it, to save a nation. In the name of God, women did the work.

I have to go back into Chapter 1, that I didn't ask Dee to read, Chapter 1 at the very end, in Exodus, talks about the midwives. They're the first characters, the first on-the-ground participants in this story, Puah and Shiphrah, the midwives. You see, the pharaoh has asked the midwives to kill all the baby boys, throw them in the river, but Puah and Shiphrah come up with a conniving little plan because they're faithful to God and they really don't see any reason to kill innocent children, so they come up with a great little story, and they say, "You know, Hebrew women are just different from you Egyptian women. They have their babies before we even get there. They're strong and hardy, they're not like Egyptian women. And the babies are born before we arrive." So Puah and Shiphrah, indeed, with their conniving little story, risked their own lives, and they're the first saviors for Moses.

Those of us who are parents, or who have been around children as they're growing up, know that when the text that Dee just read says, "A Levite woman saw that her newborn son was a fine baby," that that means she looked into his eyes and she saw a future that was beyond her and beyond him, that she really wanted him to live into. There's a country song that says something about a baby being born in a local delivery room, and growing up and finding a cure for disease and saving a million different lives. Well, that's what all parents, including this Levite woman, sees ahead of this baby if she can just figure out a way for him to live. So, this amazing woman does an amazing thing. She follows the Pharaoh's orders. She actually does indeed throw her son in the river, as the

government edict calls for. She just happens to put a basket underneath him, before she puts him in there. You see, she was not like us. She did not live in a society where the rules are fairly normal. Terrorism is the rule of her day. Her child is not allowed to live. He is to be the victim of what we would call today “ethnic cleansing.” Pharaoh looked around and saw all these Hebrew people. “There’s just too many of those people in our country, they’re taking our jobs, there’s too many of them floating around. I order they be killed.” His death, you see, has been state-ordered. So even though Puah and Shiphrah had managed to save the baby’s life in the beginning, his life is still very much in danger. And so his mother does the unthinkable and puts him in a basket and puts him in that great, big river, knowing that he might die, knowing that he might drown, knowing that he might fall into the hands of government officials anyway, but not seeing a whole lot of alternatives. She’s hoping that perhaps she can save his life. She is indeed another savior in this story, another long-range visionary and another woman.

Then we have Miriam, the sister of that baby in the basket, who follows the basket down the river. Now, I imagine a scene from a Hollywood movie. You see this scruffy, dirty-faced, maybe her hair’s up little girl, maybe she’s missing a couple of teeth, and she’s frolicking down by the river bank, acting as if nothing besides just a regular day of play is going on, no one suspecting that she is really keeping an eye on destiny. And it’s Miriam who, when the baby gets plucked from the river by the Egyptian woman, runs to the river and says, “I can get you a Hebrew nursemaid for this baby, if you like.” And it’s this miraculous irony that allows Miriam and Moses’ own mother to nurse Moses as his fate in the Pharaoh’s court takes over, that his mom is the one who nurses him and helps him to grow. Miriam is another savior in this story, another long-range visionary, another woman.

I think one of the most significant women in this story, however, is the Pharaoh’s daughter, and it’s not because she was of a higher social status. It’s because in some ways, she’s the one that took the greatest risk. It was she who pulled a Hebrew baby, not an Egyptian baby, a Hebrew baby out of the water and named him Moses, which means “pulled out.” It was she who let a Hebrew boy live in an Egyptian palace. It was she who, despite her father’s governmental policies of death and destruction, looks at a baby and sees not the “other” but someone to be loved and appreciated. It is the Egyptian woman, the Pharaoh’s daughter, who looks beyond race and class and gender, and looks instead through the eyes of love, and lives into her fullest humanity. The Egyptian princess is another savior in this story, another long-range visionary, a woman.

I ask us today, which characters do we see ourselves as? Both as individuals and perhaps even as a church, or even greater than that, as a country. Are we risk-takers, like the midwives? Are we willing to put our own lives on the line to protect our children? Are we as a nation willing to do whatever it takes to protect children everywhere? Do we want them insured and clothed and fed and educated, whatever the cost? Or do we wish to argue instead about tax cuts and too much governmental interference? Are we sacrificial protectors, like the mother in this story? Are we willing to give up our own self-interest to seek a new way for the next generation, or are we too stuck in our own need, to let go of what we love? Are we as a nation too stuck on our own comforts to

sacrifice ourselves, to lay it all out on the line for the next generation's security? Maybe we're like Miriam, active watcher and listener, jumping in from the sidelines when necessary to offer help to all who need a boost. Or are we just too numb from all the bad news that our future is floating away, so numb that we watch it just disappear, just watch it go away without stepping in to try to change things. Are we as a people willing to stand idly by and watch as bad things happen to good people? Or are we willing to get involved in the process, and fulfill our civic duties and help one another? Are we like the princess, safe and secure, enjoying the good things in life, and yet willing to look into the eyes of a needy and desperate foreigner, a stranger, and see not the "other," but only love and humanity? Or are we still too scared of race and class and gender to move beyond the ways we let them bind us into helping only ourselves? Are we as a people willing to move beyond fear, and look at the "other" and see not a reflection of something different, but a reflection of ourselves, and indeed the very image of God?

The Bible is filled with amazing stories of men and women who step outside of an expected role and do interesting and amazing things to let God lead their lives. For example, when a poor young peasant girl named Mary was told in a visit from an angel that she would become pregnant and have a son, that she was to call Emmanuel, "God with us," she had to be terrified. She had to think, "Is this a dream? Am I going crazy? I must be insane. Maybe I'm getting sick." And yet somehow, she can see even beyond herself in this moment and into a future. What it holds, she can't possibly know. She doesn't know, and she can't imagine, that one day she will hold her son's lifeless body in her arms. But because Mary has heard these stories that I shared with you today, Mary has heard the stories of the women surrounding the life of Moses. Because she has their example to look toward, she knows that being a faithful woman of God means making tough choices. It means surviving harsh and unexpected circumstances, and that stepping outside of yourself means saving the world. And so Mary says, "Let it be."