

Worship 21.01.31

Exodus Part 3 - Framing Stories - stories that shape, lead and inspire us.

SCRIPTURE-

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.'

## SERMON:

This past Monday afternoon I lay on a table in the sanctuary of Park Forest Baptist church, my eyes moving from one huge poster board to another, each with a quote from a psalm, like 'be still and know'. I wasn't feeling very still, I was irritated, wondering why that nurse wiping down the table behind me wasn't at my side, taking care of me. 3:30 in the afternoon and I had a full evening of Zooming ahead - I wanted to donate my blood and get out of there. And what about that other nurse? Out of the corner of my eye, it looked like he was just writing stuff on a clipboard. My foot was swinging impatiently from side to side by the time she came over and started checking my arm for a vein to use. I've been told I have great veins - so easy to stick for blood draws - can I be proud of that? So when this young nurse kept massaging the crook of my elbow, and finally asked the other nurse what he thought, it all clicked. She's new at this, and he's supervising. Oh goodness... Do I really want her poking my arm with a needle? I immediately stopped my jiggling foot and took a deep breath, not wanting to show my impatience and make this harder than it needed to be.

She was slow, methodical, careful and got the needle in just fine. She cleaned up around me and then said, "I don't think I told you my name, did I?" No, I agreed. "I'm sorry, I should have told you my name right from the start. I'm India. And Buddy and I are going on our lunch break now, so another nurse will finish you up. Don't worry, you won't be forgotten."

Off she walked. But wait... come back. I want to hear about your name, and Buddy's too. I didn't mean to feel so impatient, I want to hear about your work here, maybe encourage you... I didn't even say thank you for taking good care of me..."

It felt a little like I was watching a little basket of possibility float down the river, right on past me.

Here we are this morning, our biblical story about the birth of Moses.  
Moses - the one who will lead God's people to freedom.

This is the beginning of a 'big story' - one that changed the world.

Richard Rohr might call this part of "the story", a story that is not just about a person, or even just a tribe. It's a story that transcends time and borders, where the great patterns of the Holy One are always true; true for everyone, all the time. These 'big' stories are meant to save us from the smallness of 'me' and the illusions of 'we', when we miss the fact that we all belong to one big tribe, not small ones that exclude others.<sup>1</sup>

Moses -the only name we hear in today's story; Moses, named as 'the one who was drawn out of the water'.

We often look for ourselves in these big stories. Where do I belong here? We want to see ourselves in these stories because we long for our own small stories to make a difference in the world, to have meaning. We hunger to have our own stories matter.

This great big story starts in the common place. It's set in the ordinariness of life.

Lovers marry,  
people have children,  
women go down to the river to bathe.

Where do we see ourselves in the great story of the exodus?

At times, I've identified myself as being like Moses' - delivered from the waters when I've felt like I'm floating, helplessly along. Or when I've felt inadequate, telling God all the reasons I can't do what I'm being beckoned to do.

Other times I've seen how much I am like all the other Hebrews in this grand story, those who grumbled, those who wandered, those who were rescued again and again...

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[https://cac.org/our-story-2021-01-26/?&utm\\_source=cm&utm\\_medium=email\\_&utm\\_campaign=cm\\_&utm\\_content=meditation](https://cac.org/our-story-2021-01-26/?&utm_source=cm&utm_medium=email_&utm_campaign=cm_&utm_content=meditation)

At times of intense fear, I have acted like Pharaoh, not welcoming new life, but crushing the ideas, possibilities that invite me to God's way of abundance.

But here we are, at the banks of the river. These enslaved Israelites are facing persecution, brutality and murder the likes of which I have never known, and most of us here today don't know.

So it's a stretch to identify ourselves with the oppressed Hebrews in our story. And we don't necessarily relate to Pharaoh either - we don't have the limitless power, making life or death decisions for a whole people.

We're not the Hebrews... We're not pharaoh...

But there is one character to whom we bear a striking resemblance. It's a nameless woman who spoke first in our text this morning. It's pharaoh's daughter. A person of privilege, a person with rights and choices, a person with enough leisure to pay attention, who had enough freedom to act, who had enough resources to give. She's the nameless woman who had everything necessary to just walk away.

In her protected world, this basket was an intrusion - unasked for, unsought, just like many of the baskets in our own lives.

Who would have blamed this woman if she just walked away.

Who would have noticed?

I've walked away, have you?

Sometimes those moments go completely unnoticed until they've floated on by.

I've missed plenty of chances to reach out and connect - seeing those opportunities as intrusions in my busy life. Not even asking the name or thanking the one caring for me.

For pharaoh's daughter, walking away would have been just another common moment on a regular, ordinary day.

But it's on those little moments that history is made.

We crave the big stories, but we forget those big stories are woven out of the little moments of our small days, of our particular circumstance,.. God uses all of it, even those who don't know they're part of such a story.

We don't really know anything about Ph's daughter, we don't know her name, we don't know if she agreed with her father's decrees or not, we don't know if she got into arguments with him at the dinner table, all we know is what she did in this very moment.

She looked.

She saw,  
she sent for the basket,  
she opened it and she was moved with compassion.

That young, privileged woman who went down to the river to bathe, she had no idea that she was stepping into the river of history, about to change it in unimaginable ways.

She simply stopped what she was doing and acted out of compassion. She acted. She immediately made a plan to care for the child; made a commitment to bring this foreigner into her home, into her life. Pharaoh's daughter steps into the river, names this child Moses' - for her action 'I drew him out of the water'. A name which much later is symbolic for Moses' drawing his people out of the life threatening waters of slavery and the sea of reeds.<sup>2</sup>

She enters into a relationship with one who was not seen to be worthy of life.

What is it that moves her to act, to risk involvement, instead of sending that basket down the river, right where it came from?

Researchers who study why strangers do acts that risk their own lives - those who harbored Jews during WWII, who donate kidneys to strangers or stop on the highway

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<sup>2</sup> Fox, Everett, 1997. *The Five Books of Moses*. Schocken Books.

to pull someone out of a burning car - researchers find that those people who do these big acts of heroism, they all started by doing small acts of kindness. Likely they engage in small ways of helping others - volunteering in their local food banks and libraries, helping out in schools. They develop habits of caring for others, seeing the other as worthy of love and compassion.<sup>3</sup>

Earlier we heard Betsy Murphy tell the story of her namesake, her aunt Elisabeth Alden Scott. I want to come back to that story for a moment...

Betsy told of how her aunt Elisabeth and her husband John were brutally murdered, leaving behind their 3 month old infant, wrapped in a blanket, tucked in a drawer with a \$20 bill... sounds a lot like a baby of long ago who was carefully placed in a basket and hidden in the reeds at the edge of the river - waiting to be rescued and given a new life. Betsy went on to tell us how the child was miraculously found by the local Chinese pastor's wife, and carried halfway across China to be reunited with family.

That nameless pastor's wife finds that baby, and has compassion.  
Pharaoh's daughter simply showed up and acted.

These are the mustard seeds of the kingdom of God.

Again and again throughout the gospel story, we see Jesus reminding those around him that their ordinary lives are connected with the big story of God.

Jesus stressed that right now we are all living in the big story of God.

You know those stories, like when

Jesus took that little boy's generosity of sharing his few loaves of bread and a couple of fish, and used it to show the 5,000 how that one impulse of generosity could be life changing.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.happinesslab.fm/season-2-episodes/episode-1>

Or when..

Jesus in that one, ordinary moment, stopped and turned with compassion to that shy timid woman, who simply held onto the hope that if she just touched the hem of his garment she might be healed.

Jesus took the small, ordinary moments and pointed the people to the reality that the kingdom of God is in our midst, that the big story of God is being played out right here, right now, in our lives.

The kingdom of God is at hand: act, trust, love, live... do it now. With Jesus it was always 'now'.

My friends, you're never too old, never too young, to be a part of the big story.  
Never too insignificant to be a part of the big story.  
Your life matters.

Your life matters - no matter how small it might feel at this moment in time.

One day this week, as I whispered my early morning prayer, asking Jesus, the Lord of Life, to show me what I need to do today, I heard "Show them that they matter" - Show them that they matter. Everyone matters.

Showing one another that we matter... it's as simple, and maybe as life changing as stopping and pulling that basket out of the reeds.

Stopping, seeing, acting. Making space for the kingdom of God, here, now.

Our story today began when a young woman went down to the river to bathe on an ordinary day.

What basket might be right in the middle of the reeds, if you but looked up and saw it?