

Worship 21.02.07

Exodus Part 4 - Framing Stories - stories that shape, lead and inspire us.

SCRIPTURE-

Exodus 2: 11-25

Some years later, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong, 'Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?' He answered, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?' Then Moses was afraid and thought, 'Surely the thing is known.' When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.

But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the wilderness of Midian, and sat down by a well. The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses rose up and came to their rescue, and watered their flock. When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, 'How is it that you have come back so soon today?' They said, 'An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock.' He said to his daughters, 'Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread.' Moses agreed to settle down with the family, and eventually married one of the daughters, Zipporah. She bore a son, and he named him Gershom; for he said, 'I have become a sojourner residing in a foreign land.'

Many years later, the ruler of Egypt died, but the Israelites still groaned under oppression. They cried from the depths of their bondage to God, who heard their moaning, and remembered the covenant that had been made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the children of Israel. And God knew.

Begin scripture/sermon with:

As you listen to the scripture this morning, I invite you to notice ways Moses is beginning his personal journey of transformation. Notice the passage of time, how Moses is identified, his actions and consequences, and how he changes throughout this story.

And as you listen, hold onto this idea, from Richard Rohr:

There can be no outer freedom without some level of inner liberation... If we pursue freedom from a reactionary position, out of our own fear or anger, we are working on too small a scale. The path to full liberation always has its source in an Infinite God. ¹

SERMON:

Moses was a third culture kid.

A third culture kid is someone who, as a child, spent a significant chunk of time in a culture other than the culture of his birth parents. They learn to weave together elements of their birth culture and the other culture in which they are raised, into a third, unique culture.

Third culture individuals are quite good at building relationships with other cultures, yet often struggle with their own cultural identity, finding it challenging to develop a sense of belonging and attachment to either culture - seeing themselves as being culturally homeless.²

Yes, Moses was a third culture individual, stepping out on the journey of figuring out who he was and where he belonged.

Moses, born an Israelite, claimed by an Egyptian princess, was raised in the home of his birth - learning the language, the songs, the rituals, the cadence of Hebrew life, living there until he was weaned - likely around 3 or 4 years old. Then his world was upended and this young child suddenly found himself living in a palace, without a familiar face, maybe needing to learn a new language, certainly having to adapt to new ways of acting in this foreign world.

Missionary kids often identify as being third culture kids, especially when they return to the homeland of their parents - not quite fitting in anywhere, feeling culturally nomadic, or homeless.

You don't have to leave the United States to feel like a cultural nomad.

Emmanuel Acho is the Host and producer of "Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man", a webseries and now book, about racism. Before that, he played 4 years in the NFL, mostly for our beloved Philadelphia Eagles, before retiring and becoming a Fox sports commentator.

Son of Nigerian immigrants, Emmanuel was raised in Dallas TX, where he went to St Mark's School, a predominantly white all boys school. He describes a stark realization in middle school, when he wasn't sure where he belonged. He was black by skin color, but Nigerian by culture, with meals of thick goat meat stew and super strict expectations surrounding family life, unlike those of his peers. Emmanuel and his family were heavily involved in missionary work in Nigeria.

He speaks of having a huge identity crisis as a teenager, often hearing things like "Emmanuel, you're not even black".

Emmanuel Acho might be considered a third culture kid - learning how to code switch - changing his speech and behavior to fit into the culture in which he found himself.

Code switching, sometimes called shifting, was exhausting for him-
Where did he fit in, truly belong?

¹ from [Rohr devotional 1/18/21](#)

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_culture_kid

This life of shifting between cultures took a lot of energy, and yet he says it helped him develop a deep empathy for others, grasping the complexity of relationships at a young age. That, along with being grounded in Christian faith, gave him a sense of purpose and calling, leading to his most recent work of hosting conversations around race with white people.

Not wanting to live and work out of place of anger and fear,

Emmanuel aims to “Speak truth with grace and love”. It’s how he is living into this idea of outer freedom found through inner liberation...grounded in an Infinite God.³

Our scripture today starts off:

““Some years later, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.”

There can be no outer freedom without some level of inner liberation... If we pursue freedom from a reactionary position, out of our own fear or anger, we are working on too small a scale.

Where did Moses belong? Where did he find inner and outer freedom?

It appears Moses is working out of a place of anger and then fear - not in relationship with anyone.

The Hebrews don't welcome him in as one of their own. And there's no connection with the Egyptians either, he doesn't even express any remorse for the killing, only fear for his own life when found out, and so he flees.

He fled. On the run.

But then there's a subtle shift in the language of our story.

“He settled in the wilderness of Midian, and sat down by a well. “ and a few verses later “Moses agreed to settle down with the family, and eventually married one of the daughters,”.

He settled, found his place. And he sat down by a well - that place where water is drawn up from the depths, the place that sustains life.

He settled, he sat, no longer on the run. And when the women are mistreated by the shepherds, we're told, “Moses rose up and came to their rescue and watered their flock.”

He rose up and came to their rescue. This Moses is not the one who struck out of anger, but moves out of a sense of caring for the other. He came to the rescue of the vulnerable, and watered their flocks. He tends to their needs.

When the 7 daughters, that mythical number for wholeness, when they return to the house earlier than expected, they are chastised for not welcoming this foreigner into their home. Connections are being made. Moses is welcomed instead of having his authority questioned, allowing him to settle into himself, who he truly is, a rescuer, even further.

Yet in the naming of his son, “Gershom; meaning something like, ‘I have become a sojourner residing in a foreign land.’ he recognizes that he still lives in that space of the third culture - belonging, yet not quite at home.

Moses is undergoing transformation - slowly finding outer freedom, the way to liberation for himself, and eventually a whole nation.

³ <https://brenebrown.com/podcast/brene-with-emmanuel-acho-on-uncomfortable-conversations-with-a-black-man/>

How about us? Many of us resonate with feeling like a stranger in a strange land, even if we've never lived outside the borders of this country. Feeling different, feeling like we don't belong - it's a common, often lonely feeling.

At some point in our lives, maybe many times, we find ourselves in this place of change - where ideas, attitudes, ways of being need to be let go of. The changes may be in our outer life - moving away from unhealthy relationships or habits, maybe choosing new ways of living out our values, but outer changes always involve inner liberation to be transformative.

And The path to full liberation always has its source in an Infinite God...

Liberation always is grounded in an infinite God. Doesn't always feel like it, does it?

Our passage today ends with a grim picture of the continued suffering of the Hebrew people... we read:

"Many years later, the ruler of Egypt died, but the Israelites still groaned under oppression. They cried from the depths of their bondage to God, who *heard their moaning, and remembered the covenant...* *God saw* the children of Israel. *And God knew.*

Many years of oppression, of crying from the depths of bondage. God heard, God remembered, God saw, God knew.

The path to full liberation always has its source in an Infinite God.

The journey is long. It's hard - taking us into the wilderness of our lives. For Moses, it's really just begun.

Moses may not see it, the Hebrews may not sense it, but God is present - with those suffering, with Moses as he settles into who he is. God knew. God knows, here and now.

God is with us on this journey. Always with us.

End sermon with music: "I am with you, on this journey"