

Sunday September 4, 2022  
Lesson 1: Standing Up Against Oppression  
Scripture: Exodus 1:1-2:10

**Context:**

This fall we begin a new series titled “Freedom.” Throughout the next several weeks, we will discuss the freedom given to us by God in life and how this concept plays out daily. We will also explore how freedom in the biblical definition is different than the rugged individualism and blind tribalism we have in today’s culture. Our first unit is titled “Rescue” as we look at how the scriptures call us to look at the story of Exodus and the salvific work God does for the Israelites and us today.

The set-up for the Exodus begins in this section as the Israelites are not recognized in the land where they live. Following the genesis narrative of Joseph being reconciled with his brothers in Egypt, the families stay in the land. Yet as the generations change, there is a new Pharaoh who does not know Joseph and his family. “Knowing” means more than being an acquaintance or being informed; it bespeaks of a relationship in which there is depth.<sup>1</sup> If you do not know someone, it may be difficult to seek their well-being as evidenced when this new Pharaoh comes to power. All the Pharaoh sees is a new fertile group of individuals gathering and being a threat to the status quo.

As a result, the Pharaoh enslaves the people. The Hebrews, who have been identified as a people, are in the process of losing their identity.<sup>2</sup> The Egyptians do not care and soon the Pharaoh decides to take things a step further.

Pharaoh instructs two Hebrew midwives, Puah and Shiphrah, to commit infanticide by killing boys after they were born. Initially this seems like an uneven match. Here are two Hebrew women versus Pharaoh, the ruler of the land and a revered figure throughout the ancient world. The odds are against them. And yet the women resist. They refuse to kill the boys and when confronted, they give an excuse which cannot be substantiated.

In this case, God uses the women to do great things in the face of empire. The midwives’ ethic of defenseless resistance is rooted in an understanding of God’s creative work.<sup>3</sup> God’s creativity is paralleled by the midwives’ creative disobedience.<sup>4</sup> They help to carry out the work of God in a unique way.

A twist in this event comes when a Levite woman saves her son by placing him in a basket and sends him down the river. She instructs his older sister to watch out for him and to watch the basket. When the Pharaoh’s daughter finds the basket, she is moved by pity and

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<sup>1</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, “Exodus,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2010), 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

saves the child. The older sister offers a nurse and thus Moses is nursed by his own mother and yet eventually returns to the Egyptian court to be raised by the Pharaoh's daughter.

### **Application**

Do you ever think about how the decisions you make today will impact others around you tomorrow? Often, we may be tempted to believe our decisions simply affect us or just those around us. Yet time and time again, we see how the decisions we make today can shape the world around us for tomorrow, for better or worse.

I often wonder if the women in today's story, any of them whether it was Puah and Shiphrah, the Egyptian princess, Miriam, or Moses' mother, realized how their decisions would radically change the world. By defying an authority which sought to destroy others, they saved lives and helped protect those around them. Because of their decisions, future generations were spared, and God worked creatively to bring order out of chaos and empire.

I will confess I do not always think of how my decisions impact future generations. I do admit to practicing the words of Micah 6:8 and living them out: to seek justice, to exude kindness, and walk humbly with God. Am I fair to others, treating them as I would like to be treated? Do I show others grace and act kindly towards others, even if I do not like or care for them? Am I humble, naming I do not know everything and still seek God's will daily? These are the kinds of questions I ask myself on repeat, seeking ways to live at peace with God, with myself, and with others.

Recently, I've been thinking a lot about those who have come before me and the way they labored so much so I might eat fruit today I did not plant. I think of how they tried to make decisions which bettered the lives of the ones who came after them and how they tried to do the right thing, doing as best as they could to provide for those they loved. They sought to make life better and more secure, giving of themselves for others.

I remember my grandfather, who after retiring from education, spent his time divided between cutting the grass for widows and finding ways to support the church. I distinctly remember his devotion to praying for his pastors and searching for ways to encourage them. I consider my father who spent years faithfully serving the church by itinerating and not trying to turn our polity into a call system or social ladder, encouraging others to focus on daily ministry instead of church politics. I think of my mother who read the Bible to her children every night and taught us home spiritual practices like the Advent wreath or practicing hospitality to guests. I think of the countless generations of pastors and laity who gave decades of their lives to build the United Methodist Church so people might be connected and serve in life together. These individuals, whether with individual or communal decisions, looked to think about those after them and give both an example and a template for how we too might make decisions which benefit or plant fruit for those after us.

Some of these decisions seemed a little simpler than what we read of in the text. And yet I also know of how even our most mundane decisions can carry a greater weight than we might imagine. When we choose to do the fair thing, the kind thing, or put on the humble attitude God asks us to cultivate, we can create a domino effect for generations to come. God can take our daily acts of faith and transform them into something greater than we could ever imagine on our own.

How have you seen a little decision make a huge impact on the world eventually? What decisions do you make which might impact those who come after you? Why is it important to think of future generations when we make decisions? Who are the people you see who made decisions which impacted you for the better in today's world? What scriptures guide you in how you make decisions every day?

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