

Exodus 1:22-2:10  
Rivers of Ruin to Rivers of Redemption  
Rev. Jonathan Cornell  
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By a show of hands, how many of you have ever hosted or attended a Christmas party? Now let me ask, how many of you have ever hosted or attended a Lenten party? Anyone ever get a “Merry Lent” card? That’s because it doesn’t happen. For the most part, society has said to the church, “You can have Lent.”

This is the first Sunday in a 40 day period we call Lent, which comes from the Old English word for “Lengthen.” These 40 days culminate with Easter Sunday. The purpose of Lent is to focus our lives on following Christ all the way to new life. Jesus embarked on a 40 day journey into the wilderness; the Israelites did, as well, only theirs was a little longer. But the purpose of both was to increase their trust and dependence upon the God who was leading them. So it is for us this Lent.

One of the important questions of this season for those who follow Christ is: “What are the visible markers that help you press forward on your journey of faith?” Is there an obstacle in front of you that might actually be an opportunity?

Did you hear the one about the Texas rancher visiting a farmer in the Middle East? The proud Middle Easterner showed him around. “Here is where I grow dates, over there is my olive grove. Over there is the area where my children play, next to the pen where we keep our sheep.”

The land was tiny, and the Texan was surprised at how small it was. “Is this it, is this all your land?” he asked. “Yes,” the man said proudly. “It’s all mine!”

“Well, son,” said the Texan, “back home I’d get in my car before dawn and I’d start driving and when the sun set, why, I’d still only be halfway across my land!”

“Oh, yes,” said the farmer wistfully, “I used to have a car like that too.”

This morning, we are beginning a message series on the book of Exodus called *Markers*. Each week, we will look at a different story from this great book that brings to light God’s care for his people—sometimes without their even realizing it.

**Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.” Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him. Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the**

river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

God meets us in the circumstances of our lives, even the most disorienting. **How do you interpret the circumstances of your life?** What meaning do you attach to them? How will you make sense of them? Job loss, family strife, declining health, the hope for a child, the news of an unexpected child, these are the situations that confound us. And it's into these questions that the book of Exodus speaks forth with an answer.

We meet this text on the heels of some devastating news. Every boy born to the Hebrews is to be cast into the Nile. The Nile River is a paradox. On the one hand, it's the giver of life to the land of Egypt. When the banks of the Nile overflow from the rains that fall on the plains of Ethiopia, Egypt has good crops. To the Hebrews at this moment, the Nile, however, was a symbol of death. The people depend upon it, but it was also dangerously unpredictable.

It says then in verse 1, **a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months.** I think there is a reason this couple goes unnamed at this point, because this could be anyone of us. Anyone of us could face a difficult decision regarding the wellbeing of a child.

It says that Moses' mother puts him in a basket. This is a strange and devastating moment for this young unnamed mother. Her story has as many twists and turns as the river itself. But it's a story that inspires something deep, something visceral within us. Her love for her child was so powerful that by giving him over to God, sending him down the river, she trusted that God had something bigger in store. This child did not belong to her, but to God and God's people.

This story perhaps inspired the creator of the Superman Comic series, Kal El's parents faced a difficult moment, and they sent him down a river of sorts, and he was adopted by the Kent family light years from his home, but it was for a greater purpose. You see, when we view our life as a part of God's great story, our lives are never small and insignificant; our story is always a part of a grander narrative. And this helps us to interpret the difficult circumstances of our lives.

Moses' mom doesn't know what will happen when she sends him out into the river, but she believes that God's going to intervene. Interestingly, the word used here for basket is

the same word used in Noah's story for Ark. This basket was going to be the place of salvation to an entire people. But it takes Moses' mother's faith to believe that God was not done with her situation.

The first glimmer of hope that we get in this story comes from one of the power brokers, a part of the ruling party, a young girl from the family who issued the very edict that sent this child to the river, Pharaoh's daughter. She comes down to the river with her maidens to bathe and sees this child in the reeds. She scoops the child out of the water. Right away, the baby's older sister Miriam has a flash of genius. She's standing at a distance and comes running to her. When Pharaoh's daughter notices that the child is Hebrew, the boy's sister seizes the opportunity to intervene and before she can think of another plan, Miriam says, **"Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go."**

This is a courageous moment. This is a game changing moment. This is a moment of great creativity that changes the course of the story. Just because the situation was dire for the Hebrews, doesn't mean that they were helpless to change it. I think God invites us to join him in creatively preserving life. Nowhere does God ever indicate that we're just supposed to roll over and be victims of circumstance. **When adversity comes our way, God looks at all of us that surround it and says, "That's why you're there."**

The history of the church is filled with Miriams, women and men who had the courage and creativity to say, "I can do something about this. With my situation, I can change the course of this event." People like William Wilberforce, Oscar Romero, Martin Luther King Jr., and Gary Haugen from International Justice Mission who saw young girls and boys around the world being sold into slavery and said, "With my abilities as an attorney, and with the help of others like me who will seek to understand foreign legal systems, we can work with foreign governments to end this scourge." It is a powerful thing when men and women seize the opportunities to change someone's story.

All it took for Miriam was Pharaoh's daughter to say "go"—which as we read through Exodus will become a recurring theme throughout the book. Miriam brings the boy's mother, and for the next three years this mother was paid from Pharaoh's coffer to raise her own child. God making lemonade with lemons.

Then after 3 years, Jochebed (later we learn this is his mother's name) brings the child back to Pharaoh's court, where his daughter gives the child a name, the name Moses. As I was reading this week, I learned that this name had Egyptian significance; in Egyptian the MSH signifies a son; but she will give to the child a Hebrew etymology *Moshe*, "one who has been drawn from the waters."

Pharaoh's daughter chooses to act miraculously on behalf of Moses; instead of acting violently, the way of her father, this young girl will choose love. Interestingly, I think this is one of the first instances of adoption in the Bible. Pharaoh's daughter lifts the child out of this pool and rescues him.

But interestingly, and I think this is the most critical image we can take from and learn from this text: the Egyptians see this place of rescue as a pool, still water, one frame in the greater landscape of the Nile. But the Israelites see a river. And what do you get with a river? You get to see upstream—where we’ve been. Here, if we look back at the book of Genesis, we can see all sorts of blessing and promise, as well as hardship and adversity that the Hebrew people have faced. There was a promise made to Abraham that a child would come, a child of promise. So families and sons came and with each one we wondered would this be the one. Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, who also found himself in Pharaoh’s court and also was a rescuer to his people. Seeing our lives and our circumstances in light of the river gives us the benefit of seeing the past.

But we also have the gift of looking downstream. The book of Exodus is about God’s people being exited from slavery, drawn by God into the wilderness where they learned (or didn’t) to trust in Yahweh’s provision. This people would be established by God as a powerful nation who would be used by God in mighty ways, but who themselves would falter and stumble and would face adversity and disconnection.

If we look way down the river, we see another child, born of adversity, taken into Egypt as an infant, who also passes through the waters—the waters of baptism—who emerges to lead a people. This man would be God’s agent leading his people through the waters of baptism, through adversity as well as mercy, heartache, and healing, ultimately to the cross.

Seeing our lives as a part of this river, not just through the lens of the pool, is a powerful metaphor that can help deepen our faith in God’s ongoing work in our lives. The river is something that is never stagnant; we are always being swept along seeing what God has done and what God will do. Rivers flow through death, murder, heartache, job loss, illness, worry, eventually to the cross. But it also flows to life, to redemption, from fear to love through the person of Jesus Christ who adopts us into his royal family.

What I want to leave you with – if you have a pen or pencil handy take it out; I want you all to write something down, and I want you to put it on your refrigerator, or somewhere where you will see it and be reminded of it every single day. Everyone....ready?

“God draws you through waters into his love.”

“God draws you through waters into his love.”

Let’s pray.