

Exodus 1:8-10, 15-17, 20-22; 2:1-10  
Led Through the Waters  
Rev. Jonathan P. Cornell  
1-13-19

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Never underestimate the value of a momentary encounter, for even these can dramatically change the course of your life.

As a 16-year-old brand new driver my first automobile was one of the feats of American Engineering, the 1989 Ford Thunderbird, 4-cylinder, rear-wheel drive—oh yeah! On one of the coldest and snowiest days of the year, on my way home from school I ended up stuck in the ditch. Soon after, up pulled a rusted out and rather intimidating truck, and out stepped its driver...equally intimidating. However, with kindness and gentleness that I have never forgot, he helped free my car from the snow bank and set me on my way. It was a momentary encounter, but it stays with me even today.

The truth is, in one way or another, we all need someone to come to our rescue. That person may play a permanent role, or it may be someone who steps in, fulfills their role, then exits stage left. Both can have lasting impact. This morning we begin a new series of sermons in which we are going to be looking at a number of people who find their way into the pages of God's story for but a moment, but their impact lasts far beyond them. What we will see is that even though their presence is brief, God uses even the minor roles in His major work of renewing creation and restoring people.

This morning I want to invite you to turn with me to the first chapter of the Book of Exodus. Here we meet a few women who through a simple act of Civil Disobedience dramatically change the course of the life of God's people. And they teach us something very valuable about God's promises to us. Listen as I read selected verse from Exodus 1 and 2.

**Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. <sup>9</sup> And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us.<sup>10</sup> Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land."**

**<sup>15</sup> Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, <sup>16</sup> "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live."<sup>17</sup> But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. <sup>20</sup> So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. <sup>21</sup> And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. <sup>22</sup> Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews<sup>[a]</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. <sup>3</sup> When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes<sup>[a]</sup> and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. <sup>4</sup> And his sister stood at a distance to know what would**

be done to him. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>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.”<sup>7</sup>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?” <sup>8</sup>And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Go.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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.”

So, many years had passed, and memories had begun to grow fuzzy. The name of Joseph, that visionary Hebrew with the gift for interpreting dreams, who had risen to second in command in Pharaoh’s court had slipped from memory. Joseph was no longer a household name, and his people had now been foreigners in a far-off country for a generation. They had forgot the story of God coming near and making a promise to Abraham, a promise of a nation and a calling.

**“You will be my people, and I will be your God. I will bless you so you will be a blessing.”**  
But by that point, it seemed like just a distant memory.

What they did know was that they were foreigners, and now apparently, unwelcomed foreigners in Egypt. Numerically, they were flourishing, but this posed a threat to the King. It’s easy to turn the people we don’t understand or perceive to be a threat into the enemy of our way of life. It’s a short trip from the unknown to the enemy.

In a horrific move, Pharaoh chooses to act to suppress the population of the Hebrews. But at a decisive moment, where they faced destruction, an intercessor arrived. Two women, midwives by the name of Shiphrah and Puah (anyone here have a sister named Shiphrah?). Now we don’t know a lot about these two women, but we know that they are God-fearers who have a position of trust with the Pharaoh. They are midwives for the children in Egypt, namely the Hebrew children. They are bearers of life. And yet in this story, they are given an unconscionable order by Pharaoh, with a choice to make: follow the directive, or spare the lives of a generation of Hebrew males.

The Hebrew children, God’s children, faced the prospect of one outside of themselves acting decisively upon them; the question was whose actions would prevail? The will of a murderous, slave-driving, despot, or the will of redeeming God, carried out by a few heroic women?

But this isn’t the only end around in the opening verses of the Exodus. Just a few verses later, still under that same dictate, a woman has a son. When it was no longer possible for her to conceal his presence, she placed him in a clam spot in the Nile—the same body of water that was the place of such hurt became a haven of safety and rescue. And again, by an act of providence, God used an unlikely character to continue unfolding his plan of redemption.

Throughout the scriptures God, time after time, draws unlikely, unsuspecting people, even foreigners into His plan of salvation history. The baby who was brought in by the daughter of the Pharaoh, by some deft maneuvering of his older sister, would eventually lead God’s people out of captivity, through another dangerous body of water into the path to life. Moses, the man who

would be the recipient and bearer of the Law of God, Ten Commandments, and would write or help write much of what we now have as the first 5 books of the Old Testament (The Pentateuch) would lead Israel through the wilderness to the place where the Promised Land was within reach.

This all happened because a few women feared God, and said “yes” to becoming His instrument, and then acted heroically and decisively for the sake of another.

You do not have the Bible without the actions of those who hear and follow, and along the way become God’s powerful instruments for generations to come. Throughout the scriptures what we see God choosing to act on behalf of his people long before we are aware. The Prophet Isaiah says it this way in Isaiah 43:1-3

**“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.**

Our identity is not something we are able to create for ourselves with hard and calculated moves. Our identity comes to us because even before we were born or could imagine it for ourselves, someone was already acting on our behalf. Throughout the Scriptures we see time and again a people who are invited to see and understand that God is a people making God, inviting us to turn and see that it He who has called us by name and gives us an identity.

The God we worship is calling us home to a family and an identity, taking what once was not, making it so, intervening through men and women who are his instruments of mercy and reconciliation to give you a future filled with hope. As Jesus would later say in John 15:16, **You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.**

And the sign of this identity is none other than water, and more specifically the waters of baptism.

This morning the thread woven its way through worship is baptism. In this Sacrament, this holy ordinance, God uses His redemptive purpose to give this water dual purpose in our lives. As these two women, and Moses’ Mother and Sister looked out at the Nile, what they saw on one hand was a very threatening dangerous presence. Water in ancient times was often associated with chaos, danger, water was not recreational but it was something to be feared and respected.

Even in the opening words of Scripture in Genesis 1 hear of God moving over the watery chaos to create. Later, when Moses had grown up and led the Israelites to the shores of the Red Sea, what they saw before them was a looming threat, and what was bearing down on them was an equally dangerous foe. And the question was, would this be their end, or would it be the place and sign of God’s victory and protection.

In baptism, Jesus joins us at the bank of the river, the place where we see what a future without God might have for us. Dangerous, uncertain, without hope. In his baptism Jesus was signifying his identity as fully human, and his full identification with our mortality. In Baptism Jesus was foreshadowing the cross. In Luke he says:

**"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it" (Luke 9:23-24).**

Later the Apostle Paul will write: **Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death" (Romans 3:27).**

The second movement of baptism reminds us that at just the right moment, like those Hebrew Midwives, we are snatched from death's grip, we are led through the Red Sea, we emerge from the tomb with Christ alive and new. In your baptism you are marked and sealed by his resurrected life. You now bear the markings of a new identity, you belong to a new family, you have a new future (one filled with hope). You no longer do you belong to the masters of this world, the masters of: beauty, fame, success, money, and all the other task masters that hold us captive. You belong to Christ, and in baptism you now bear the family traits of God's royal family.

Apostle Paul later writes in Romans 6:4 that: we were **buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.**

This is an occasion for us to remember who we are, and to remember whose we are. Every time you walk into this place and you look down at this substantive marble font, don't just see a piece of church furniture, an accoutrement of this room, see a reminder of the grace of Jesus Christ, a symbol that you have been washed clean by the blood of the lamb and bear the markings and identity of a new family, God's family. All because someone intervened on your behalf, someone chose to act decisively and lovingly to rescue you and give you an identity.

Every time we witness a baptism, and are invited to renew our baptismal vows, what we are reminded of is the amazing gift of being united into the unconditional love and safety of family. You didn't choose your family, and for some that is a very painful reality. But you were chosen by God to be a part of His family. And that identity bears all the markings and rights of royalty. You were chosen by name, and grafted in because King Jesus loved you first.

The Engerholm Family Story, Lita.