

Home Worship Service August 23rd, 2020

*I have to cast my lot with those /who age after age, perversely,
with no extraordinary power, /reconstitute the world. {Adrienne Rich}*

Invocation

In these changing times, we have learned much about those who are left out, those who are unwelcome, those who are at risk. Such stories are found throughout human history- and so are stories of faithful, courageous wisdom- stories of doing better. Today we hear an ancient story - may it question and challenge us, as we dance into the stories yet unfolding.

Music

Dance with the Spirit [by Jim Strathdee, sung by Jim and Jean Strathdee]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znay0YpnElg>

Prayer

Holy One, we do not worship alone, even if we see others only on a screen, even if we say this prayer on our own, in our living room, our kitchen, our porch, our yard. Worship is always and forever the work of your people. Wherever we are today, we are aligning our hearts and souls with those of all your beloved, to listen for your Spirit, the same spirit moving through all beings, all creation. Your Spirit speaks not just to us but of us, and of all who dwell on this earth, and all who dwelled before us. Your Spirit speaks to us through memories, our memories of those who have shared our lives, but also memories preserved in stories new and old, handed down through generations. And so, we still hear those ancient stories, and within them your Spirit echoing down through the ages. May they prompt us to hear today's stories better, as we write with you the next chapter of our story- a story which matters to all your beloved, even those we will never meet. May it be so!

Music

church

Spirit of Gentleness.

Jim Manley, sung by the choir of Ebenezer United

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bs6f9vA6s2o>

Readings

readings read by **Frank Loomer**

Exodus 1:8-2:10

1:8 Now a new Pharaoh arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.

1:9 Pharaoh said to the Egyptians "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we.

1:10 Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land."

1:11 Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh.

1:12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites.

1:13 The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites,

1:14 and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

1:15 The Pharaoh said to the midwives of the Hebrews , one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah,

1:16 "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live."

1:17 But the midwives were God-fearing women; they ignored the Pharaoh's orders, and they let the boys live.

1:18 So the Pharaoh summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?"

1:19 The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them."

1:20 So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong.

1:21 And because the midwives were God-fearing, he gave them families.

1:22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

2:1 Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman.

2:2 The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months.

2:3 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.

2:4 The baby's sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

2:5 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.

2:6 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.

2:7 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?"

2:8 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother.

2:9 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.

2:10 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."

Psalm of Delivery

[adapted from Miriam Therese Winter, WomanWitness]

Deliver me, O God, from the cramped quarters where my spirit sojourns.

Deliver me into a freedom where I can be myself and grow.

Deliver me into the wide-open arms of your loving presence.

Let me cling to the source of my sustenance until I have had my fill.

Deliver me into the courage to live with questions.

Deliver me into a household of faith and an inner peace.

Your touch is the feel of the fullness of faith when the night falls thick around.

Your love sustains and warms me.

You have given me life and you support me through times of new birth.

We are not alone. We feel your presence and know that you are near

Reflection by Jane: Stories of those with, mostly, “no extraordinary power”

The stories that we weren't told.

I don't know about you. But I heard my first Bible stories in Sunday school, and religion classes at my church school, and in a children's Bible story book, and later in church camp. And I didn't know till later, about all the stories I never heard.

These other stories- I learned about them as an adult.

I was hanging out with women looking for women in the Bible and finding them.

Delving more deeply into the stories we thought we knew, for instance about the women around Jesus, But also stories we'd never learned but were there all the time -

Such as the story of the midwives.

The midwives' story changes everything

Once you start the Moses story by reading the midwives story It becomes a different story, A story that takes on more and more meaning throughout the ages.

A story unfolding against a frightful backdrop-

The Hebrew people, Joseph's descendants, had migrated to Egypt and made themselves at home and reproduced mightily.

But suddenly a new Pharaoh makes them into non-persons, slaves, to be exploited-

And then tells his people these Hebrews are a threat, they are too many, you should be afraid of them, what if they take over or side with the enemy. starts perceiving them as enemies, as threats- there are too many of them, what if they take over- or what if they side with the enemy in time of war.

This has happened throughout history-

Of course, we think about Hitler right away and others who persecuted the Jews. But also, in my student years in England, some political leaders were

whipping up hostility against those of Asian or African or Caribbean origin, suggesting that there were too many of them, they should go back where they came from, making Britain so -called British again.

And in Canada, our British ancestors expelled Maritime Acadians 255 years ago in case they might not be loyal in wartime, and because they wanted to give their land to Anglophones.

We dispossessed and interred Japanese Canadians in World War 2,

And, occasionally, we still hear voices suggesting we have too many immigrants, too many new Canadians.

So, back to the Pharaoh - he promotes hatred of the Hebrews and keeps oppressing them more and more - but they are still there.

So, then he tries what today we'd call genocide- destroying a whole people.

Not killing everyone, just the baby boys.

He assumes only the boys will grow up to cause trouble.

And of course, if there are no Hebrew males, the Hebrew women will have to marry Egyptians- and their children will be little Egyptians.

For those of us living after the Holocaust, this story has more and more painful layers of meaning- even more so as we learn about other genocides past and present, including that of our indigenous population.

Resisting oppression 101

What do you do if your government asks you to do something evil?

Sometimes, as in the Nazi era or in war time, people might excuse themselves.

I was only obeying orders?

And the question arises in our era- is this enough to excuse someone?

It's a fine line - a topic for ethics and history and the modern field of international law.

In Canada, if we think the laws are bad, or if we see human rights are being violated,

We can protest, we can advocate, we can petition, we can file class actions and more.

Around the world, we. have the Geneva Convention and more recently the International Criminal Court.

The midwives, be they Hebrew or Egyptian, had no such options.
Either way, they could have said- well, the Pharaoh is the boss and we have to obey.

But they could not do this.

We don't know which God they feared, but, whoever their God was ,
they believed killing babies was wrong.

Their job was to bring children into the world, not do away with them.

Public outcry would have got them nowhere.

They used the power they had quietly, behind the scenes.

And they used their wits.

How could the Pharaoh prove that Hebrew boy babies weren't born before the midwives got there?
Hang out with women in labour?

I would guess- wouldn't you- that there are a lot more such stories than we know of those "without
extraordinary power" doing what they can to make a difference,
Not all these stories can be written- especially not at the time.

What happened next?

Well, the midwives wouldn't cooperate.

So the Pharaoh enlisted the Egyptians as a whole, You go get those baby boys and throw them into the
river.

Enter Moses' mother- Jochabed.

She knew you can't hide an active baby forever.

And here we see a splendid example of women cooperating across age groups and cultures-

The mother puts Moses out by the river in a basket-

The basket just happens to be where Pharaoh's daughter bathes,

And Moses' sister Miriam just happens to watch what happens next.

And Pharaoh's daughter, happily, is a lot nicer than her dad- likely word was out about that .

She is meant to find the baby and she does and takes pity.

And Miriam happens to pop out and recommend a wet-nurse who just happens to be Moses' mother.

Very likely Pharaoh's daughter figured the whole story out.

But she too used her wits and she knew what not to say, and once Moses was weaned, and not another
word about him being a Hebrew boy.

Who knows how many other stories there might have been of such conspiracies among women?

What does it mean?

Heroes are not always high profile, front and centre.

Change does not always begin as front-page news.

Actions speak louder than words, especially when you have to watch your words.

Heroes, leaders, public change-makers never got there alone,

But always because of those behind the scenes who nurtured them and formed them and supported
them,

whose names we may not know.

Joe Biden would never have been Senator or Vice President or President Candidate without his parents,

Who lived quiet lives as working people,

His father setting an example of hard work and resilience,

His mother helping him stay in school when he was being bullied and work to overcome his stuttering.

When you see the famous people, the heroes, the celebrities,

Ask yourself,

Who behind the scenes made their lives possible, helped them succeed?

When you hear of liberation movements, social justice movements,

Remember not only the famous leaders,

But those behind the scenes,

caring, protecting,
Helping babies survive?
Children get to school,
Supporting those who are vulnerable or at risk.
Teaching the message, You are as good as anyone else and don't you forget it
Along with the message Love your neighbour.

Take-away words

Today, who is making a difference behind the scenes?
May we be among them, even if we never make it into the history books?
May we be among those who quietly help reconstitute this world,
And together may we remember, and help others remember,
Who we are, who they are , who each of us is, who all of us are together.
May it be so.

Reflection Music:

We Are [Sweet Honey in the Rock]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWaw-tQ4W7w>

Minute for Mission

“Healthy Babies in Gaza”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLwYVg9wss4>

Offering Prayer leading into the Prayers of the People

Holy One, we give thanks for the little ones in our family and community. We seek a world that is good for all babies and children, where births happen safely for babies and mothers, where babies have the food, shelter, health care and love they need, where children have these needs met along with their need for good schooling, where families are supported in their need for child care and other help, where young people receive the mental health care they need, where children and youth in difficult situations receive support

Where mothers and children are protected against family violence.

To this end, we seek to build a compassionate community of faith- supporting each of us in our care for those young, our practical care and our sharing of healthy, life-giving messages. We make our offerings to sustain this community and to support all those Mission and Service endeavours which support babies and children and youth around the world.

In our wider community and our country, may we speak out for the wellbeing of babies and children and youth- especially any who are at risk because of their background, or the colour of the skin, or their sexual orientation and identity. May we speak out against discrimination and speak for inclusion. And as the pandemic has taught us about inequalities, may we especially attend to those who suffer disproportionately because of income , because of loss of jobs, because of the risks of working on the front line. May these concerns remain with us as we question our electoral candidates and discern our best choices.

In the wider world, we pray for children and families who live in Gaza and other war zones, in refugee camps or in other places where they face discrimination, poverty and adversity. May we never cease to strive for a world where all have a good start in life and a good chance of surviving and thriving, whoever they are and wherever they are born.

And in these days, close to home, we especially pray for parents and children and teachers preparing for the beginning of school. It is indeed an anxious time and we hold them in the Light, and seek to offer encouragement and support wherever we can.

And now in a moment of silence we hold in love and Light all who need our prayers.

These and all the prayers of our hearts we join with the prayers of many around the world and across the ages as we pray together: Our Father [and/ or Mother or Creator],.

Song of Commitment:

O for A World

[Miriam Therese Winter, tune Azmon]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWaw-tQ4W7w>

fast forward to about 1 minute into the Youtube- sung by an American Presbyterian gathering

Blessing

As we go from here, may our every action proclaim our hope in justice;

May our every word proclaim our joy in compassion; May our every heartbeat proclaim our peace in God. Amen.

We Go Forth Blessing and Blessed

You Raise Me Up

[Josh Groban, sung by the Color Children's Choir]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRclEMgppK8>

Blessing from Keri K. Wehlander, Circles of Grace. Other prayers by Jane V. Doull

Dedications

