

Sunday – August 23, 2020

Worship with the Rev Linda Saffrey (St Mark's United Church)

Lectionary readings

Exodus 1:8 – 2:10 Baby Moses adopted by Pharaoh's daughter

Psalms 124(VU 848) If God had not been on our side!

Romans 12:1-8 Present yourselves as a living, holy sacrifice to God

Matthew 16:13-20 Who do you say that I am?

Welcome: Words of introduction and lighting of the Christ Candle.

Hymn: Come Now, Almighty King * (VU 314)

Come now, almighty King, help us your name to sing, help us to praise;
one God all glorious, ever victorious, come and reign over us, Ancient of
Days.

Come now, incarnate Son, your life in us begun, our prayer attend;
come, and your people bless, come, give your word success; stablish your
righteousness, Saviour and friend!

Come holy Comforter, your sacred witness bear in this glad hour;
your grace to us impart, now rule in every heart, never from us depart,
Spirit of power!

To the great One in Three, eternal praises be for ever more;
your sovereign majesty may we in glory see, and to eternity love and
adore!

Call to Gather:

God calls us to gather on this Sabbath day.

God welcomes us, one and all.

We worship together, joyful in God's presence, wherever we may be.

Wherever we may be, we are gathered in the unity of Jesus Christ.

Come, let us worship our gracious God.

We worship God with love, thanksgiving, and praise!

Opening Prayer:

Creator God, you have made us all different, giving to each one of us special and wonderful gifts. You invite us and challenge us to share who and what we are for the good of community. In the beauty of our differences, remind us that we are one. In this time of worship help us to celebrate the Body of Christ, and the special place each one of us has in that body, through your grace. Amen.

Scripture Readings: Exodus 1:8 – 2:10 and Psalm 124

Message: God's power hiding in plain sight

We're having a bit of a baby boom in my clan. As I was preparing this service I was receiving texts from a sister about the imminent arrival of her granddaughter. That would make the count of great nieces and nephews born this year - four, and we expect another before the end of the year!

There was a baby boom of sorts in ancient Egypt. It was not joyfully received by the Egyptians. The Hebrews had come during a famine. Many

were from the large family of Joseph, the trusted advisor to the previous Pharaoh. They came and they stayed, and they grew exceedingly – multiplying like rabbits. Scripture uses the word “teeming” which reminds me of a really good smelt run in the spring. It seemed to the current Pharaoh, who had no personal connection to those people, that they were growing at wild pace. Perceived as a threat, they were treated as less than human – feared and forced into hard labour. The evil leader took extreme measures to eradicate them from the land.

John C. Holbert wrote: "It is always far easier to play the tyrant than it is to be God's people."

The story of the Exodus is a story about the hard work of God's people. It can be women's work – women working behind the scenes, women fearing God more than the power of those who exploit, women filled with compassion, women with creative imagination and daring resolve. It is also the story of young people – of big sisters and young daughters, of a slave and a royal working together. It is the story of resistance. The women and girls play a key role in keeping God's covenant promise alive.

Two of the women are identified by name in our salvation story – the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah. Their courageous act of civil disobedience changes history. One of the boys who is spared will be called Moses and he will lead the Israelites out of Egyptian captivity. He will deliver God's law to the Israelites and bring them to the promised land. Before that can come to pass our salvation story will need people who will stand up to acts of injustice. Before their freedom can be realized, it will

take many years to turn things around. But it begins with the daring resolve of two women who feared God.

As I was preparing this service we were approaching Emancipation Day - celebrated in Ontario August 1st to commemorate the end of slavery in this country in 1834. We are living a time in our history when we are being reminded of things we would rather forget, when the truth of our past and continued actions confronts us and demands change. Black Lives Matter protests and anti racism movements have brought to our awareness the vast inequities in how people experience life in this country. By the time you are hearing this message perhaps you will have already moved on from these current events to different pressing things. So I will remind you of the funeral July 30th for American civil rights leader - Congressman John Lewis. In a message he left to be read the day of his funeral he said: "If you don't do everything you can't change things. They will remain the same."

At Lewis's funeral former President of the United States, Barrack Obama talked about Lewis's life as a young man, and of how he marched with others in the civil rights movements of the 60s, of how he and others were "challenging the infrastructure of oppression." Where people are denied the basic humanity of fellow citizens, somebody has to speak up. Obama praised those who have the moral courage to question what's right and wrong. It is a long journey towards freedom. Obama went on at some length in a political speech about voter rights, lifting up the concerns and the work that had been John Lewis's. Before I had even read some social media responses about how inappropriate it was to politicise the eulogy I

was thinking that it may be inappropriate to some, but it is very biblical. It is very much “God’s way” to use whatever platform you have, whatever means at your disposal, to bring about the blessing that is intended for every person in the world. It is OK to be breaking the rules that keep people oppressed.

In the slave pens of ancient Egypt, a mother hides her baby in a hand-made boat, a basket covered with pitch and set into the reeds at the edge of the river. What was she hoping for? A miracle? A few more days of life for her child? – like Hagar leaving Ishmael in the desert, knowing that she had exhausted her options, and being simply unable to witness his death? The mother leaves but big sister stays. It is big sister’s job to baby-sit and to report back, to watch and see what happens. Of course one might expect that she will, within the next day or so, bring home terrible news to her mother. But as the story unfolds, the surprisingly impossible outcome becomes a reality. We are challenged yet again to consider: “shall anything be impossible with God?”

Another young girl is also hiding in the reeds. In spite of the fact that she probably has a perfectly fine bathtub at home, she has come to the river to bathe. Serendipity? Or divine intervention? The Pharaoh’s daughter discovers the baby. Hers is also an act of courage and civil disobedience when she chooses to follow a path different than the royal decree. The baby Moses is adopted and raised in the palace of the Pharaoh, and nursed by his own mother! This is possible because people have the moral courage to question what’s right and wrong. Our own small acts of defiance, of resistance, of listening to another point of view, of hearing stories and seeing people in all their humanity – must also be lifted up and

encouraged as we make that long journey towards freedom for all God's children.

Andy Andrews wrote a little book called the Butterfly Effect in which he catalogues the extraordinary impact of simple and courageous efforts. Except when you go back, you can never really tell which efforts made the biggest difference. So, for instance, should Norman Borlaug, who developed high yield, disease resistant corn and wheat be credited with saving two billion lives from famine, or should Henry Wallace, the one-term U.S. Vice-President, who created an office in New Mexico to develop hybrid seed for arid climates and hired Borlaug to run it. Or should we credit George Washington Carver, who took a young Henry Wallace for a long walks and instilled in him his love of plants. Or should it be Moses and Susan Carver, who adopted the orphaned George as their son. Or should it be... Well, you get the idea. Andrews points out how interconnected our actions are creating an unforeseen butterfly effect that can ripple across time and space to affect the lives of millions.

Shall anything be impossible with God? God's purposes bear fruit in the work that we do, in the work of strangers and friends. In today's reading God's purposes unfold with the actions of Shiphrah and Puah, quietly standing up to a bully and tyrant, and continue with the actions of a mother, a sister, a royal daughter and her maids. The things we do this week – our actions, our decisions, our choices – will also ripple out with consequences foreseen and unforeseen, for good or for ill, for the health or damage of the world. But have no fear, because God works in surprising ways, and God has promised to be with us, no matter what. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Offering Prayer:

We offer our gifts, O God, and our varied ministries, that we may work together to fulfill your purposes in creation. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer



Come, all who are broken-hearted, all who are oppressed, all who are afraid, all who hunger and thirst, all who rejoice, all who celebrate, all who are healing, all whom the world counts as last and least. Come, you are all welcome here. God created a wide world of welcome, filled with good things, with food and drink for all beings. God nurtured a wide world of welcome, and provides a table of welcome for the universe: a loaf of bread, a loaf of life, a loaf of compassion - a loaf to strengthen, nourish and sanctify. A cup of water, a cup of sacrifice, a cup of covenant - a cup to renew, refresh and make whole. As we gather at the table, we proclaim our praise and thanksgiving for God's great love and mercy.

Gracious God, hear us as we lift up our loved ones and our concerns in prayer.

We pray for the church and its varied ministries, its communities of faith and its leaders – especially today Nipissing Restoule, Willowgrove UC Sault Ste Marie, and Trout Creek UC.

We pray for our own faith communities who share in summer worship. May each person, and their loved ones, enjoy a summer that brings refreshment and renewal. We pray for the safety and wellbeing of all, especially those named in prayer, and those named only in our hearts, and those whose concerns are known only to You, gracious God. Keep us faithful until we gather once more.

We pray for the world, neighbours and strangers, for all who struggle to make ends meet, all who suffer illness and its effects on body and soul, all who are lonely, all who need safe drinking water and refreshing rains to grow crops. We pray for our scientists in every field of endeavour, and for those who tend to our safety and well being in fields of medicine, government, community service.

We pray for people in places of power, that in their decision-making they would exercise holy manners, and offer leadership that is just and fair to all people.

We pray for ourselves, in our times of growing weary, in our times of uncertainty about the future. Keep us ever mindful of your presence with us in all life's circumstances.

Bless us, and hear us as we pray the prayer of Jesus.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"* (VU 651)

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak, but thou art mighty, hold me with thy powerful hand. Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more, feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain, whence the healing stream doth flow; let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through. Strong deliverer, strong deliverer, be thou still my strength and shield, be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside; death of death, and hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side: songs of praises, songs of praises I will ever give to thee, I will ever give to thee.

Benediction:

Go to serve God with grace and strength. Go confidently and unafraid.

And may the God who created you in love, the Christ who redeems you, and the Spirit who is our helper – go with you, wherever your journey may lead. Amen.

Choral Response: Let Us Praise the God of Truth * (VU 237)

Let us praise the God of truth, let us praise the God of peace, let us praise the God of love. Amen. Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Amen.

(*hymns in the public domain)