

God's Word for this Week

Sunday 23rd March 2020

The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity



The Collect

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O God,

you declare your almighty power
most chiefly in showing mercy and pity:

Mercifully grant to us such a measure of your grace,
that we, running the way of your commandments,
may receive your gracious promises,
and be made partakers of your heavenly treasure;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Old Testament Reading

Exodus 1: 8 - 2: 10

8 Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹He said to his people, 'Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. ¹⁰Come, 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.' ¹¹Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labour. ¹²But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 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.' ¹⁷But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. ¹⁸So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, 'Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?' ¹⁹The 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.'²⁰So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. ²¹And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. ²²Then 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 Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman.²The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. ³When 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. ⁴His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

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. ⁶When 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. ⁷Then 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?'⁸Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Yes.' So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹Pharaoh'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. ¹⁰When 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.'

The Epistle Reading

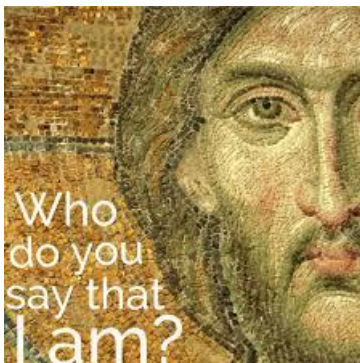
Romans 12: 1-8

12 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters,* by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual* worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world,* but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.* ³For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

The Gospel Reading

Matthew 16: 13-20

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' ¹⁴And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' ¹⁵He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah,* the Son of the living God.' ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter,* and on this rock* I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' ²⁰Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was* the Messiah.*



Psalm 124

- 1 If the Lord himself had not been on our side,
now may Israel say;
- 2 If the Lord had not been on our side,
when enemies rose up against us;
- 3 Then would they have swallowed us alive
when their anger burned against us;
- 4 Then would the waters have overwhelmed us
and the torrent gone over our soul;
over our soul would have swept the raging waters.
- 5 But blessed be the Lord
who has not given us over to be a prey for their teeth.
- 6 Our soul has escaped
as a bird from the snare of the fowler;
the snare is broken and we are delivered.
- 7 Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who has made heaven and earth.

Pointers for Prayer

Bulrushes We should never underestimate the power of God at work within our lives. This week the story of Moses begins in treacherous circumstances which set the scene for a similar series of events within his lifetime that force him into unknown territory again and again. It is unlikely that we will ever know the dangers encountered by this man, nor the challenges to his belief in God. Today we meet him as an oblivious child in the hands of a clever and careful mother who sees to it that he is rescued by a member of the most powerful household in Egypt and even puts in place a plan whereby she can partake in the raising of her own son.

The lives of the children are at risk at the hand of a power-hungry Pharaoh. **Consider the countries of this world where people are oppressed and where fear such as this arises on a daily basis. Let us hold these nations and their people to the protection and care of God.**

Some may see the Pharaoh's daughter as an integral part in God's plan for Moses, yet her presence and discovery of the child was due to the careful planning of the child's mother. **Who are the people in your past or present who are constantly watchful for your wellbeing? Consider the people in the past who have been part of God's plan for your journey in this life and give thanks for them today.**

Through her own ingenuity Moses' mother became his sole guardian until he grew up. Then she was

compelled to return him to the Pharaoh's palace and into the care of that family. Consider the depth of a mother's love and what this type of love teaches us. Consider those who are grieving the loss of a child or those who cannot have children; those who are concerned for their children's welfare or future. Let us hold these remarkable parents into God's light and pray for the guidance of his Spirit upon them.

A Word

Think of the connections between birthings and beginnings in this parashah. Sh'mot begins by emphasizing the fertility and prolific birth-rates of the people of Israel; the text makes it quite clear that the Israelites have an uncanny ability to bring new life into the world. In other words, even as the Egyptians try unsuccessfully to hasten the ending of the Israelites' lives, the Israelites respond by ushering even more beginnings into the world. At the start of this parashah and the book of Exodus, the people of Israel are portrayed as living in the face of dying, beginning in the face of ending.

Consider, then, the special position of Shifra and Puah in these initial verses of Exodus. Significantly, the Book of Exodus begins with an overt act of political defiance by two women who are themselves serving the enslaved Israelites. Yet these women, seemingly in a subservient position to a subservient people, enter into a high-stakes power play with the king of the ruling nation! This fact, in and of itself, sets the stage for the eventual and ultimate defiance of Pharaoh by the Israelites.

Further, it is no coincidence that midwives are the featured players in this episode. In their everyday lives, Shifra and Puah literally aid the birthing process of individual women. In their refusal to obey Pharaoh, they assume a key role in the collective birthing of the people of Israel. Fearing God rather than the political authority of the day, Shiphrah and Puah are rewarded for their insistence on life rather than death. As the Talmud says: "It was the reward of the righteous women of that generation that caused Israel to be redeemed from Egypt."

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/birthings-and-beginnings/>

Worth Considering..

So who were these heroines who were willing to risk their lives only to never be mentioned in the Torah again?

The *Talmud lets us in on the secret and reveals the real characters behind the code names Shifra and Puah.⁵ The Talmudic sage Rav held that Shifra referred to Yocheved (Moses' mother) and Puah to Miriam (Moses' sister).

The commentator Rashi takes the view of Rav, and explains the mystery behind the names themselves. The name "Shifra," he says, translates as "improvement," a reference to the way that Yocheved would "improve" the newborns by cleaning them and straightening their limbs. "Puah" means "cooing," a reference to how Miriam would "coo" to the babies and sooth them.⁶

*Talmud: (literally, "study") is the generic term for the documents that comment and expand upon the Mishnah ("repeating"), the first work of rabbinic law, published around the year 200 CE by Rabbi Judah the Patriarch in the land of Israel.

