“Six Great Bible Stories: Moses and the Midwives”
Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris

Exodus 2:1-10

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when
she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. 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. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

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. 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. 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?” Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. 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. 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.”

This morning brings us to the last of our Sermon Series on “Six Great Bible Stories.” It has been our goal to share in the
foundations of our faith through these great stories and to develop a greater familiarity with the Bible as God’s living
word of life for us. We have also seen how these ancient stories inform how we approach a variety of current issues—
living into diversity, anti-racism work, and today, the welfare of our children. For indeed, everything that we do here at
First UMC in ministry and in mission is grounded in these old, old, stories. These stories are our story—our story of
faithfulness, our story of purpose, our story of commitment, our story of love.

We spent five weeks in the Book of Genesis and today we venture into Exodus and come to Moses, the hero who led the
Israelites across the Red Sea. But actually, I’m going to maintain that the heroes of today’s story are not so much Moses as
others. He’s just a baby here. A newborn. Totally vulnerable. We know how beautiful and how precious and how special
and how vulnerable newborn babies are.

Let’s pause here for a moment to hold in our hearts the babies born into our church family this year. We recognize that the
time we’re living in is like no other, with many milestones and celebrations taking place in new and unexpected ways or
held in abeyance. We hold their families in our love and prayers and look forward to the time when we are able to
worship together in person to celebrate their baptism.

For like all newborns, these precious ones are totally dependent on the adults in their lives, their families and their faith
community. And sometimes, in spite of all that their loving parents might want for them, they are vulnerable to the
conditions of fear and violence into which they have been born, through no fault of their own. They need adults to step in
and take a part in their welfare and their well-being.

We have a story like that right in the 2nd chapter of the 2nd book of the Bible, the Book of Exodus. It’s a beautiful story
about love, a mother’s love and the love of strangers. It’s a story about violence and about children at risk. It’s a story
about how saving the life of one child saves the life of a whole people. It’s a story about the ways in which even the souls
of “enemies” intertwine. It’s a story about courage and about choosing life. It’s the story of Moses and the midwives.

Remember back to the story of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph, his brothers, and his father, Jacob, once they have
reconciled, live together in the land of Egypt and they prosper there. The family grew and grew. As one translation puts
it: “the children of Israel…became many, they grew powerful—exceedingly, yes, exceedingly; the land filled up with them.”

But, in time, a new king comes to rule over Egypt, one “who had not known Joseph.” That personal connection between
Hebrews and Egyptians was lost. The Hebrew people became vulnerable to the whims and aims of their Egyptian hosts.
The new pharaohs were seeking to regain lost Egyptian territories and the presence of large numbers of Hebrews on their
border came to be seen as a security risk. Not so different from any number of stories in today’s news.

Pharaoh said: “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.” He set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. But when
even that was not enough, he ordered genocide and told the Hebrew midwives to kill the baby boys at birth.
Here's where the hand of God starts to become apparent in this story. And let me tell you, the first hero is not Moses the great Liberator, not yet, but two of those very midwives, Shifra and Pu'a. Shifra and Pu'a knew who they were and who their God was. Whoever raised them, taught them and grounded them so thoroughly in the love and the righteousness of God that when Pharaoh himself commanded them to kill the Hebrew baby boys, they let them live. Period.

Not only that, when Pharaoh saw what was going on he hauled them in for questioning. They stood right in front of his face and lied: “The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women. They are vigorous and give birth before we can get to them.” Can you imagine the guts that took?

The scripture doesn’t say how Pharaoh reacted, but I guess he must have accepted their explanation. Because it does say that God was well pleased and favored them—and so the people multiplied and became strong. Pharaoh grows more concerned. He commands his troops to throw all the Hebrew baby boys into the Nile and kill them all.

Now we come to the part of the story we heard Dara read this morning. In the midst of all that violence, a baby born is born to a Hebrew mother and father. A fine boy, strong and beautiful. The midwives let him live. His mother manages to hide him for three months until the situation becomes untenable. She builds an ark, (remember the Noah’s ark?), she builds a little ark, a sea-worthy basket of pitch and loam, and sending his sister to the riverbank to watch, places the boy in the basket, and sets it on the gently rocking Nile.

Now God acts through another woman, the most unlikely one of all. Pharaoh’s own daughter is down at the river’s edge, bathing, surrounded by her attendants and entourage. She sees the basket among the reeds. She looks inside, hears a baby crying and takes pity on him. With a heart full of compassion, in full knowledge of what she is doing—for she says: “this must be one of the Hebrew’s children”—she acts in defiance of her own father’s death-dealing policies and saves the baby boy.

Then Moses’ sister does her part, too. She sees what is happening and rushes over to ask: “Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” And she runs and gets her own mother to nurse the baby. Thus, Pharaoh’s daughter raises him as her own, naming him Moses: “the one drawn out of the water.” And, as they say, “the rest is history.”

But how different this story might have been, indeed the whole story of God’s people might have been, had the women turned away and that child had perished.

Friends, we live in a world, in a community, where far too many children are perishing and it need not be so. About 1 in 6 children in America live in poverty, making them the poorest age group in our country—approximately 12 million children. Living in poverty. In America. More than 70 percent of them come from working families. The youngest of them are the poorest. And nearly ¾ are children of color.

We must do better. With God’s help and strength, we can be the heroes of our story.

There are all kinds of little Moses’ out there even this day, boys and girls who need us to pay attention to their cries. They need us to believe that they have a future. They need us to step up—and there are many ways to do that through the ministries and mission of our congregation and our partners in the community—Upward Bound House, the Westside Food Bank, the Boys and Girls Club, the YMCA. Together, we can do better. Together we can end the poverty, the hunger, the homelessness of our children. Together we can raise them all into the fullness of life God intends for them and for us all—lives free of want, free of fear, lives that are rich and full and beautiful and full of promise.

This is our story, church—our story of faithfulness, our story of purpose, our story of commitment, our story of love, from the days of Genesis and Exodus right into the living of these days. May it be so!

AMEN

Notes: