

God is a Strong Woman
A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church
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Exodus 1:8 – 2:10

Let's try something different. Let's rethink today's story.

Too often, I think we read the text in a straightforward manner, and it becomes a story about the origins of Israel's exodus from Egypt. And that's fine. It's a good story to be sure.

But today, let's think about the story as an allegory. The Pharaoh, and his evil, barbaric policies represent worldly power – all those things that go against God's intended order for the universe.

And the women in this story, they are the manifestation of God's response toward evil. They are the everlasting yea – that force that gives us our value and our being and our soul. They are our hope.

When the story opens, there are too many Hebrews. They are taking up too many resources. The king decides he'll put an end to that. He enslaves them, and decrees the slaughter of all male-born children.

One doesn't have to look very far, in any age, to find rulers who will seek to discard those persons who pose a perceived threat to their power and privilege. And these rulers may not impose death sentences on their discards, but they see no issue in denying their welfare.

But God is at work. And God is a midwife. Well actually, two.

And these midwives have a specific vocation: they protect and ensure that life begins. And so they do not obey the Pharaoh's orders. Instead they tell him, "Lord, these Hebrew women, are vigorous, much stronger than Egyptian women. They deliver their children before we even arrive!"

Their response is laughable, but it's also profound. What kind of lowly midwife has the courage to stand up to the most powerful man in the world and utter such an absurdity? And in what kind of world does such an absurd response actually work?

But that, friends, is the power of God. God's power can infuse and embolden even the most fragile and the most unlikely of figures, and transform them into beings who make the absurd become possible. So imagine what happens when God's power infuses the bodies of two determined, steadfast, and tough-as-nails midwives. Pharaoh moves to plan B!

The drowning of babies seems more practical. Egyptians, toss those babies in the Nile.

And again, the allegory is biting. There are too many powers in this world intent on throwing God's children in the river – toss the undocumented on a shore far from here; toss the poor and the sick and the hungry back into the current, and let them head downstream, back into the forgotten places, and out-of-reach from OUR resources.

But lucky for us, God is at work. And God is a mama and a sister.

And if Mama's gotta send her baby out into the cruel world, she's gonna prepare a vehicle that protects her child, and steers him in the direction of an advocate. And Big Sister knows how to protect her brother, too. And she won't leave the plans of her parents to chance. She'll follow that basket and makes sure it arrives at its intended destination.

God's love is like a mother's and a sister's: it's tender, and it's intelligent, and it's fierce. It's the kind of love that can overcome the swift currents of adversity. It's the kind of love God has for each of us.

But even if the basket temporarily thwarts Pharaoh's plans, what happens when it arrives on the river bank? The baby's identity must still be protected. And its care must still be ensured.

And once more, the allegory hits too close to home. Our collective need for salvation, that space to become the persons we are intended to be, is constant. We never stop needing more space. Once we've ensured our security today, we must secure it again tomorrow and the next day and the next.

But lucky for us, God is a noble princess, and a daughter, too.

Pharaoh's daughter sees the baby, and offers him charity. She will raise the child as her own. She is the noble ruler, sworn to protect her subjects, not destroy them. But she is also the daughter of Pharaoh, the source of all this evil. And yet out of this evil, is one who has the power to do good for others.

God is not only the power to protect, but God is also the power to transform – even to transform what we cannot imagine can be transformed.

In order to secure the baby's welfare, the princess seeks a nursemaid. And wouldn't you know it, a very wise sister finds the princess the perfect candidate: the baby's mother. And Mama gets a hefty paycheck for doing the very thing she desires to do: being a mama to her child. Sweet justice!!!

And this part of the allegory isn't biting. It's inviting. When we live in God's presence, and we honor God's covenant, we are rewarded and made whole by the very thing we are intended to be and do. Parenthood, sisterhood, and servanthood are all their own reward.

As the story closes, Pharaoh's daughter renames this child Moses, because she has drawn him up from the water. And truth be told, God has drawn up each of us, and placed us along the banks of a river called life. If we are to honor our lives and our God:

May we too, be like midwives, emboldened to protect the vulnerable.

May we too, be like mothers, determined to ensure the welfare of all our children.

May we too, be like sisters, not content to wait on justice.

May we too, be like daughters, capable of transformation, empathy, and kindness.

May we too, be like Moses, drawn up from the water, the change made possible by faithful women.

Friends, God is our exodus, and our space, and the strong woman we need. So worry not. Relax those shoulders. Let the tension out of your fingers and toes. And float. She'll draw you up. And when she does, you too can help bring about the exodus your community needs.

Amen.