

August 16, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Morar Murray-Hayes



**Reading:** Exodus 1.6-21

**The Message:** Fear + Courage = Action

[Video](#)

My choice of scripture for today was inspired by Jane, our organist. She chose a hymn for after the sermon called 'Bring Many Names.'

Bring many names, beautiful and good,  
Celebrate in parable and story,  
holiness in glory, living, loving God.  
Hail and hosanna! Bring many names!

So today I bring two names that aren't as familiar as some in the stories of the Bible.

This particular passage from Exodus is transitional. The story of Joseph, sold into slavery by his brothers, who becomes their salvation as he attains power and favour in Egypt, comes before this passage and the story of Moses, who free his people from slavery, comes after.

The names of Joseph and Moses are writ large in the story of the people of Israel, but the story of Moses wouldn't have happened were it not for what happens in this passage.

If I were to ask you who were two of the most important names in the history of the children of God, I doubt you would come up with Shiphrah or Puah.

Pause

What if I were to tell you...  
...that what you do this week could change the world?

Would you believe me ... or doubt? Sit taller in your chair with hope, ... or think of something else?

Two women once made a decision, took a chance, and changed the world with a small gesture. They disobeyed. And because of their act of disobedience God was able to rescue Israel from oppression. Shiphrah and Puah have something to teach you and me.

A ruler, wishing to solidify his political base, identifies a common enemy, a scapegoat to blame for whatever current problems plague society.

Sound familiar? As we have seen throughout history, beloved children of God are robbed of their humanity whenever this happens.

A Pharaoh has forgotten that for generations the Israelites had been considered allies and honoured guests. And so he first enslaves them and then turns to even darker means, telling the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, to kill all the Hebrew baby boys that are delivered.

They do not kill the boys.

One very smart lie to Pharaoh: telling them that the Hebrew women give birth too quickly, delivering the babies before the midwives arrive on the scene.

It's a courageous act of civil disobedience that changes history, for one of the boys that is spared will lead the Israelites out of Egyptian captivity, deliver God's law to the Israelites and bring them to the promised land.

And it all starts here, with two women willing to say "no" to an act of injustice. I doubt very much they thought they were changing the world. But they were, just by fearing God instead of Pharaoh.

Fearing God is a common term in scripture. Pope Francis writes about the fear of God. He says, "The fear of God, the gift of the Holy Spirit, doesn't mean being afraid of God, since we know that God ... always loves and forgives us,...[It] is no servile fear, but rather a joyful awareness of God's grandeur and a grateful realization that only in God do our hearts find true peace."

From Proverbs (9) we learn that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

The fear of God encompasses  
awe, reverence,  
adoration, honour,  
worship, confidence,  
thankfulness, trust,  
love, and, yes, fear which urges us to obey God rather than pharaohs.

Shiphrah and Puah teach us the wisdom of repeated simple acts.

Except when you go back, you can never really tell which efforts made the biggest difference.

When a member tutors the children in one of our refugee families, who knows what that repeated act will bring?

When someone picks up a scarf tied to a pole on a cold February morning, who knows what seed of gratitude will blossom?

When housing is provided to a vulnerable family, who knows what impact that will have on the community?

When members of Christ First go out into the community and listen to the needs of their neighbours, who knows whose hearts will be stirred?

When we offer worship online, who knows how far or how deep our reach will be?

Who knows? God knows! God knows each seed that is planted.

The second verse of the hymn that Jane chose that we have included reminds us that God is in each of these small actions. That's how God works.

Strong mother God, working night and day,  
Planning all the wonders of creation,  
Setting each equation, genius at play:  
Hail and hosanna, strong mother God!

God is a God of small actions: each act that we take is God's when we fear God:

What will we do this week to make a difference in the world? Some of these actions may be big, bold, and courageous like the acts of Joseph and Moses.

Others may be small, hardly noticeable, like those of Shiphrah and Puah.

And yet they all have the potential to ripple out, affecting countless lives. In today's reading it's Shiphrah and Puah, quietly standing up to a bully and tyrant.

Who knows who it will be today, this week, this year.

Paul says that we all are members of the body of Christ, each with different gifts, yet all one in faith and with the same potential for God to use us to change the world.

So what would you do if I told you that what you do this week could change the world?