

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2020

First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: Come and worship, for Christ is Lord and lives in you and in me.  
All: **Come and worship, for God is good and invites us to accept God's love.**  
One: Come and worship, for the Spirit dwells in our midst, empowering us towards newness and wholeness.  
All: **We come to worship the Lord our God.**

**\*OPENING HYMN "Lead On, O King Eternal!" GtG 269**

One: Lead on, O King eternal! The day of march has come;	One: Lead on, O King eternal, till sin's fierce war shall cease, and holiness shall whisper the sweet amen of peace;
All: <b>henceforth in fields of conquest your tents shall be our home.</b>	All: <b>for not with swords' loud clashing, nor roll of stirring drums; with deeds of love and mercy the heavenly kingdom comes.</b>
One: Through days of preparation your grace has made us strong,	
All: <b>and now, O King eternal, we lift our battle song.</b>	

One: Lead on, O King eternal:  
All: **we follow, not with fears,**  
One: for gladness breaks like morning  
where'er your face appears;  
All: **your cross is lifted o'er us;  
we journey in its light.**  
One: The crown awaits the conquest;  
All: **lead on, O God of might!**

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**\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Merciful God,  
we confess that we have conformed our lives  
to the ways of the world  
and not the ways of your kingdom.  
We have lived for ourselves,  
and apart from you.  
We exalt possessions and power,  
when you alone are to be exalted.  
We think of ourselves too highly  
and regard others as lowly.  
We turn from our neighbors,  
and refuse to bear the burdens of others.  
We let conflicts prevail over grace  
and divisions over harmony.  
We ignore the pain of the world,  
and pass by the hungry, the poor, and the oppressed.  
In your great mercy forgive our sins  
and free us from self-centeredness,  
that we may discern and choose your will.  
Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

**\*SILENT CONFESSION**

**\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: The mercy of the Lord  
is from everlasting to everlasting.  
All: **With confidence we declare, in the name of Jesus Christ,  
we are forgiven.**  
One: May the God of mercy,  
who forgives us all our sins,  
strengthen us in all goodness,  
and by the power of the Holy Spirit  
help us to live in grace.  
All: **Amen.**

**\*THE PEACE**

One: The peace of Christ be with you.  
All: **And also with you.**

*(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)*

## THE WORD

### SCRIPTURE READING Exodus 1:8-2:10

#### EXODUS 1:8-2:10 (various)

<sup>1:8</sup> Now a new king came to power in Egypt who did not know Joseph. <sup>9</sup> He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and stronger than we are. <sup>10</sup> Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous. And if war breaks out, they will join our enemies, fight against us, and then escape from the land." <sup>11</sup> Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. <sup>12</sup> But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. <sup>13</sup> The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, <sup>14</sup> and made their lives bitter with hard labor, making mortar and bricks, and with all kinds of work in the fields. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

<sup>15</sup> The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, <sup>16</sup> "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." <sup>17</sup> The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. <sup>18</sup> So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, "Why are you doing this? Why are you letting the boys live?" <sup>19</sup> The 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." <sup>20</sup> So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. <sup>21</sup> And because the midwives feared God, God gave them families of their own. <sup>22</sup> Then 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."

<sup>2:1</sup> Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. <sup>2</sup> The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. <sup>3</sup> But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and sealed it with tar and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. <sup>4</sup> His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

<sup>5</sup> Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds, and she sent one of her servants to bring it to her. <sup>6</sup> When she opened it, she saw the child. The boy was crying, and she took pity on him. "This is one of the Hebrews' children," she said. <sup>7</sup> Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a Hebrew woman to nurse the child for you?" <sup>8</sup> Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> When the child grew up, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

## PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

**SERMON** “How Will We Answer the Shouts...and Cries?” by Pastor Bill Vincent

This message is all too easy ... and all too hard ... both at the same time.

It's easy to criticize.

It's easy to say, “Don't do that.”

It's easy to point out other people's faults.

It's especially easy, with the benefit of hindsight, to look back in history and say, “Oh, they should have made a better decision, they should have known better, they should have chosen better.”

So, let's go ahead and do the easy part.

Pharaoh and the Egyptians were wrong.

Yeh, we know the rest of the story, and we know God's ultimate verdict on Pharaoh's actions.

Pharaoh makes the classic move of identifying some group on the margins of society, pointing out their faults, identifying them as a threat. And oh how well it works, unifying his own people and motivating them to join together and be strong...together, for 'us'.

We've seen it before. We're seeing it again.

“The Indians are our enemies.” “The Jews are our enemies.” “The blacks are our enemies.” “The whites are our enemies.” “Women are our enemies.” “Men are our enemies.” “The rich are our enemies.” “The poor are our enemies.” “The educated are our enemies.” “The uneducated are our enemies.” “The liberals are our enemies.” “The conservatives are our enemies.”

“We be 'us', and they be 'them'. They're not like us. They're not as good as us. They threaten us.”

“So let's beat 'em to the punch. And knock 'em down. And bring them to their knees. And keep them in their place...which is not 'our' place, but under our thumb.”

*“And the Egyptians made their lives bitter with hard labor.” (1:14)*

It's easy to be afraid of someone who's different.

It's easy to be afraid of what we might lose.

It's easy to be afraid when it appears that resources are limited and we like our position and we don't want to share.

It's easy to point out someone else's short-comings. And so very easy to overlook my own.

And it's easy, when you have the power, to blame someone else and avoid facing my fear, and so avoid seeing what my fear might be revealing...about me.

And it's easy to say, “Don't be afraid.” In fact, we hear that often in scripture: “Don't be afraid; fear not!”

*Therefore we will not fear... (Ps.46:2-NRSV)*

the psalmist says.

Except that we do.

So, it's easy to say, "Don't be afraid, and don't strike out at other people out of your fear."

It's easy to say, "Don't do that."

Now, having said this -- i.e., "Don't do this" -- many people will point out that it does little good simply to say "Don't do..."

Like saying that to a child, and the first time you turn around, what happens?

You've taken something out but haven't replaced it with anything. And it's all too easy to go right back to doing what we've been told not to do.

What *should* we do?

That's not so easy.

Well, in some ways, it's easy to answer.

Do what the midwives do.

Do what Moses' mother does.

Do what Moses' sister does.

Do what Pharaoh's own daughter does.

Do *that*.

And what is 'that'?

The midwives 'feared God', not Pharaoh.

Actually talking two different kinds of fear.

Fear of the Pharaoh, and actually Pharaoh's own fear, was fear of hurt, fear of loss, fear for self.

The 'fear of God' is a deep reverence, acknowledging who God is as the Creator of the universe, and in understanding who God is, knowing something of who I am.

And it was that 'fear' -- the fear, the reverence of God -- that guided their lives and their actions; that let them know who should be the center of their lives; that guided their choices, even when those choices disobeyed the clear command of Pharaoh.

But those choices were made, not only out of the 'fear of God' (reverence for God), but also in response to human need. They responded, not out of fear, but out of compassion and care.

So, they 'feared' God.

They responded to human need.

They responded in compassion.

*That's* what to do.

But these choices are not so easy. They're hard.

Because they're risky.

They ask us to look beyond ourselves to the other, to others.

They ask us to face our fear and look beyond it to see potential, when all we can see is the loss of the familiar.

They ask us to face our fear and look beyond it to see possibilities, when all we can see is diminishing returns.

But these women -- and they were all women -- they make that risky choice.

The midwives.

They know fear: the fear of Pharaoh. But they also know something else: the 'fear of God'.

They hear Pharaoh. But they hear Someone else.

So they disobey the Pharaoh, and they let the baby boys live.

They risk themselves and choose life. They affirm the life of others. They nurture life in community. And in doing so, they not only choose life for others, they choose life for themselves.

Moses' mother.

She hides her son from the death command. And she gives up her son -- lets him go -- so that he might have a chance.

She risks herself, and her heart, and chooses life. She affirms life for another. She nurtures life in community. And in doing so, she not only chooses life for another, she chooses life for herself.

Moses' sister.

She watches over her baby brother. She takes action and advocates on his behalf. She fosters the relationship with Pharaoh's daughter -- gutsy move! She secures nurture and security for her brother.

She risks herself and chooses life. She affirms life for another. She nurtures life in community. And in doing so, she not only chooses life for another, she chooses life for herself.

And what about that other woman? Daughter of the very man who engenders fear and commands death.

She

*saw the basket among the reeds* (v.5)

*sent her servant to bring it.* (v.5)

*opened it* (v.6)

*saw the child.* (v.6)

*The boy was crying -- so she 'heard'.* (v.6)

and *took pity on him.* (v.6)

"*This is one of the Hebrews' children,*" she said. (v.6) She knew who it was. She knew her father's command. What would she do?

“*Shall I go and call a Hebrew woman to nurse the child for you?*” (v.7)

And then Pharaoh’s daughter committed, and she said, “*Yes*” (v.8).

And Pharaoh’s daughter risked herself and chose life. She affirmed life for another, even though different from her. She nurtured life in community. And in doing so, she not only chose life for another, she chose life for so many others, including herself.

What might this look like for us, in our lives, in our time and place? To risk ourselves and choose life. To affirm life for others, for another, and for oneself. To nurture life in community for all.

What might this look like to disobey one standard in order to affirm and live by another (standard)?

What might this look like when those who have no voice cannot speak for themselves, and we are called to speak for them?

What might this look like to give up what is precious to us in order to give what is life-giving to another?

What might this look like for those who have lost their job because of a pandemic and have not the wherewithal to put a meal on the table or food in the mouths of their children?

What might this look like to use our power and position and privilege to advocate for another’s opportunity and dignity and security?

What might this look like for someone so crushed by the lack of opportunity that they cannot earn a decent wage let alone support their own basic human dignity?

What might this look like to risk one’s self for another’s life?

This is hard, to risk for another.

This is hard to swallow my fear and reach out to help.

This is hard to give up my comfort for another to have a place at the table.

This is hard, to lose my life in order to save it.

How do we do this?

You might have noticed in our story that there is one ‘someone’ very much in the background, hardly seen or heard, it seems.

God is mentioned only 3 times in this passage, every time in relation to the midwives and no one else.

But God is still very much present, though perhaps behind the scenes (as we talked about last week). “**More subtle and indirect,**” as someone has noted [Amy Merrill Willis, *Working Preacher* 2011].

The focus of the midwives’ response is obviously guided, encouraged, aided by God: they ‘feared’ (revered) God.

It is hard to imagine Moses’ mother and sister acting like they did, except similarly in response to God.

And one can only imagine that Pharaoh’s daughter is somehow responding to the urging, the nudging of God in her choice for and response to life.

What's the difference (practically) between what to do and what not to do?

It seems to me the focus is different, but also what one pays attention to, or who one hears.

It could be said that Pharaoh listened to his heart. And all he heard was fear, and threat, and himself.

And it could be said that the midwives, and Moses' mother and sister, and even Pharaoh's daughter listened to their hearts, too. But what they heard was the cry of a child, the cry of another, the cry of human need; and in that, what they heard was the compassion and care of God, that moved them to risk and reach out, to go beyond themselves to care and help, to risk themselves on behalf of another, to see themselves mirrored in another human being and know that the risk that was worth it.

It is, quite honestly, the sovereignty of God at work, guiding and shaping our lives.

'The sovereignty of God?' you say.

We tend to associate God's sovereignty with power -- with mighty acts and powerful deeds. Like parting the Red Sea and freeing the people from slavery in Egypt. (Yes, we know the rest of the story.)

But could it be that sometimes that is our problem? We acknowledge God's sovereignty -- God's Lordship over all of life -- in big, impressive ways. But we overlook God's sovereignty in smaller, less-impressive ways.

As we mentioned before, "**more subtle and indirect**" in this story.

But Roger Nam says plainly that, here in this story, "**God's sovereignty is manifest through compassion and care.**" [*Working Preacher 2020*]

And don't think that's not powerful. Remember the people whose lives were saved.

And don't think God doesn't know that's a risk. For we remember the risk God took to love the world by sending God's only Son.

So, where will we put our focus? What will we pay attention to? Who will we hear?

The shouts of the 'powers that be' to be afraid?

Or the cries of another's need?

How will we respond?

With fear?

Or with compassion, in the full confidence of God's care for us all?

### **\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**In life and in death we belong to God.**

**Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,**

**and the communion of the Holy Spirit,  
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,  
whom alone we worship and serve.**



**Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:  
preaching good news to the poor  
and release to the captives,  
teaching by word and deed  
and blessing the children,  
healing the sick  
and binding up the brokenhearted,  
eating with outcasts,  
forgiving sinners,  
and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.**

**In a broken and fearful world  
the Spirit gives us courage  
to pray without ceasing,  
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,  
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,  
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,  
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.  
In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,  
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks  
and to live holy and joyful lives,  
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,  
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

(from *A Brief Statement of Faith*, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

#### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

**Pastor:** Lord, in your mercy...  
**People:** ...hear our prayer.

#### **THE LORD'S PRAYER** (*Contemporary*)

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and forever. Amen.**

## OFFERING

*Invitation*

*Reflection*

*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**Almighty God,  
you took a baby from the Nile  
and used him to lead your people to the  
promised land.  
Take all that we offer  
and use it for your people in this land and  
throughout your world.  
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

## SENDING

**\*CLOSING HYMN** "O God of Every Nation" GtG 756

One: O God of every nation,  
of every race and land,

**All: redeem the whole creation  
with your almighty hand.**

One: Where hate and fear divide us  
and bitter threats are hurled,

**All: in love and mercy guide us  
and heal our strife-torn world.**

One: From search for wealth and power  
and scorn of truth and right,  
from trust in bombs that shower  
destruction through the night,  
from pride of race and station  
and blindness to your way,

**All: deliver every nation,  
eternal God, we pray.**

One: Lord, strengthen those who labor

**All: that all may find release  
from fear of rattling saber,  
from dread of war's increase;**

One: when hope and courage falter,  
**All: your still small voice be heard;**  
One: with faith that none can alter,  
**All: your servants undergird.**

One: Keep bright in us the vision  
of days when war  
**All: shall cease,**  
One: when hatred and division  
**All: give way to love and peace,  
till dawns the morning glorious  
when truth and justice reign  
and Christ shall rule victorious  
o'er all the world's domain.**

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#### **\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

Pastor: ...And let the gathered people of God say...  
**People: ...Amen.**

#### **POSTLUDE**

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