

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

2nd December 2018

Exodus 1:8-22; 2:1-10

Spirit... of promise... or revelation... or re-imagination... may this be your season... and our time... to find the words... that bring new life... and new hope... to the world... so be it

I thought that with G20 summits and ongoing BREXIT meltdowns... I would seek some diversion this week... and find something else to talk about...

And I stumbled across something I had never heard of... and as people came into the church office I asked them... "Have you ever heard of these"... and was somewhat disappointed to find... I seem to be the only person on the planet who hadn't...

And you are sitting on the edge of your seat wondering... what is this new thing...

Gender reveal parties for yet to be born babies... I'm going to say that again... because you'll be wondering: "Did I hear that right?"... Gender reveal parties organised by parents... to let family and friends know if they are going to have a boy or girl...

So if you were to attend one of these parties... you'd bring in the cake... and the parents would cut it... and it would be blue or pink sponge... or you may use balloons... pop them... and watch to see if blue or pink powder would explore from them... And there are a host of youtube videos of such gender reveal parties...

What if you did that in Egypt with the Israelites:... reveal the gender and face the consequences... but from midwives to princesses... sisters to wet-nurses... this ancient story reveals rather a great human conspiracy against those who rule by fear... who stereotype... who rule by populism...

This is no children's story... so let's tell it again as if we were one of those who first heard it...

A Pharaoh has risen who cannot remember Joseph... He's a populist... stereotyping the Israelites... too many of them... they are ruining the economy... they are outnumbering the

Egyptians... so Pharaoh cracks down on their freedoms... and overnight they become enslaved... They have done nothing wrong... they are simply the wrong people...

Now the Hebrew Midwives... are to take baby boys... and drown them in the Nile... reducing the population...

We're familiar with that bit... but what we're not familiar with is... the Hebrew is a bit ambiguous... It might say... Hebrew Midwives... or... Midwives to the Hebrews... and if this latter meaning is true... then they may not have been Hebrew... but Egyptian... the reasoning being... could Pharaoh have expected Hebrew women to murder their own people's children... but either way they purposefully arrive too late and the children are born...

So often the Hebrew of the bible is deliberately ambiguous... and that's the point... in doing so the bible challenges us to appreciate a deeper truth... if we do not know whether they were Hebrew or Egyptian... the Bible is saying moral courage is not limited to the Israelites... moral courage transcends race and culture...

But there is more... Remember this was a time when there was absolute authority invested in rulers... and it feels like it is returning in some sense today... There was no sense of human rights... theories of liberty... social contract... There was no idea of a moral limit to a king's power... It was unthinkable... until those midwives began conspiring against that power... challenged the king... defied the only deal in town... in the name... of simple... humanity...

Surely this is incredibly powerful... these beginning stories in the Hebrew Scriptures... redefined what morality was then... and reminds us again today... what it is that makes us human... and what we should be challenging in our world today...

But let's carry on... Jocheved... a Hebrew woman... bears a baby boy... so she has to hide him... but ultimately he will be caught and drowned... so she sets him afloat on the Nile in a basket... hoping someone might take pity on him...

This is the spot where Pharaoh's daughter bathes... who asks her slave girls who are with her... to bring the basket... and immediately takes pity on the boy with no name... Then it dawns on her this must be a Hebrew child... Instantly the atmosphere changes...

Her father has decreed death to such a child... and to disobey his command would be serious enough for an ordinary Egyptian... doubly so for family...

And then there are her handmaids there... witnessing what is happening... Might not one of them let out the secret... you know what the rumours at royal courts can be like... but she remains rooted... her compassion... rises above her fear...

And it is then... Miriam... the baby's Hebrew sister speaks to the Egyptian princess... Surely courage only equal to the princess herself... "Shall I fetch a Hebrew woman to nurse him"...

Don't be taken in by such a simple conversation... No introduction... of "Your Royal Highness"... It is as if there is another conversation going on unsaid... something like... "You know and I know who this child is... and you know and I know the Hebrew woman I have found is the child's mother... and you know and I know this way we minimise the risk... the child becomes known as Egyptian and the mother as his nurse"...

And the princess agrees to the conspiracy against the inhumanity of her father... Remember this is the equivalent of Stalin's or Hitler's daughter... These are the consequences that Sunday School can't tell you...

And then... the child matures... and Pharaoh's daughter adopts him... and only then... only then does the story give him a name... Moses... an Egyptian name... which means "I drew him out"...

O the irony of such a name... because **we** hear... the double meaning... not only the one drawn out the Nile... but the one who drew the people out of Egypt... because of these women... and this whole story is about women... who choose to defy the authority of the king... and give safety to... and educate and within the corridors of the Egyptian palace... and care for the very one who will bring down the whole system...

This short story... is a polemic against a form of populism that creates fear of the other... against narrow-minded faith and exclusive politics... because what the story reveals is that populism... or tyranny... or fear... cannot destroy our humanity...

This... one of the first salvation stories in the Bible... has enormous implications for us as people of faith... because it clearly shows us only those of narrow faith generalise... we can never stereotype people... God is not exclusive... the Bible can never be used as an ethnocentric text... There is humanity everywhere... even in the darkness... and that is our hope...

And perhaps there is our entrance into Advent... What happens in Moses birth story... is a veil for Jesus birth story... The greatest gift of these faith stories is that humanity is truly universal... it is not exclusive... and takes place in the centre of the diversity of humanity... in among those we call our enemies... in among the shadows... in among all that is narrow and fearful in the world... then... and now... and we find there... co-conspirators against the dark... friends of different nationalities... genders... culture... who are on the side of the light... This is the conspicuous home of incarnation... the non-exclusive love of God... that universal morality... re-moralises the world... towards the least...

The deep humanity each character shows in Moses story... bridges all the differences... and all the distance... between what the world and religion and our fear of each other does to us... and what love actually intends us to be...

It is the good news of Advent... a salvation story for all who know our hope is in each other no matter who we are... needing to be heard as much now... as it was then...