

New Kilpatrick

YouTube

20th August 2023

Exodus 1:8-2:4

Gathering

There is a quiet way with justice
A dangerous way
Out of the way of the headlines
A way that few have followed
But people of the way
Have constantly got in the way
Of injustice
Way above their heads
But such a way
Has paved a way
For those who have said, 'No Way!'
And their models are two wayward
midwives
Straying from Pharaoh's way
And together will always be known
As the first way markers
Of justice, the kingdom way

Hello... I'm Roddy Hamilton the minister of
New Kilpatrick Parish... and here we are
again... meeting in this unique day... as
every day is unique... and inviting each
other... to hear a word... in all the words we
speak and listen to... that speaks of God... of
light ... of peace... of futures... Those who
help us today are two little known
midwives... who worked among the
Hebrews in Egypt... They used their cover to
hide a conspiracy against the fear of
Pharaoh and invested in the possibility of
God... I wonder if you know the names...
Shiphrah and Puah... No probably most of us
haven't heard of them... but they are two of
the very few women mentioned in the story
of Moses... and there is good reason... Let us
worship...

Prayer

Together
We bring our whole selves

We bring here
That which we like to speak of
And those which we don't
We bring the light and the dark that shape
us
The broken and the scares that have shaped
us
The stories and the secrets that have shaped
us
All of us

And it is not always easy
Such a prayer life is hard
This moment of admitting
Knowing we have hurt others
You
And ourselves
We are exposed
Vulnerable
On shaky ground

And on such ground
You meet us
As you are O God
Exposed by your love for us
Your grace that makes you vulnerable
On shaky ground when it comes to
punishment and wrath

And neither of us can do what we ought to
do
Neither of us treat the other as we deserve

Love breaks us both
Revealed as we truly are

(Pause)

May we take in the moment
Where we choose again
To live towards you
To choose truth
Choose hope
Choose forgiveness
Choose honesty
Choose life

Hear us

Lord's Prayer

Scripture Introduction

Some stories become part of you
You grow to know them so well you can tell
them freely
From a hundred different angles
Little Red Riding Hood
Goldilocks
Were once such stories
And even now we can tell them
Because they are part of our growing-up
Shaped us
Grew in us

Faith stories are designed that way
There are some that have become so much
part of us
It is difficult to tell when the story ends and
we begin
The garden on Resurrection morning for me
Or the story of creation
I love them, retell them, in a different way
each time
But they are who I am

Some stories are not so well known
We sit less certain with them
We are not so sure we know what they are
about
What are they there for?
We can tell there is a twist somewhere, but
we can't tell what it is
Or what it means
Yet

This is probably one such story
Still to grow in us
But when we let it
It has branches reaching everywhere
The two midwives of the Egyptian Hebrews
Shiphrah and Puah

Here's their story
Might it become our story...

Reading: Exodus 1:8-2:4

8 Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did
not know Joseph. 9 He said to his people,
Look, the Israelite people are more

numerous and more powerful than we.
10 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. But the more they
were oppressed, the more they multiplied
and spread, so that the Egyptians came to
dread the Israelites. They were ruthless in
all the tasks that they imposed on them.

15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew
midwives, one of whom was named
Shiphrah and the other Puah, 16 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. 17 But
the midwives feared God; they did not do as
the king of Egypt commanded them, but
they let the boys live. 18 So the king of Egypt
summoned the midwives and said to them,
Why have you done this, and allowed the
boys to live? 19 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. 20 So God dealt well with the
midwives; and the people multiplied and
became very strong. 21 And because the
midwives feared God, he gave them families.
22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people,
Every boy that is born to the Hebrews^[a] you
shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let
every girl live.

Birth and Youth of Moses

2 Now a man from the house of Levi went
and married a Levite woman. 2 The woman
conceived and bore a son; and when she saw
that he was a fine baby, she hid him for
three months. 3 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. 4 His sister stood at
a distance, to see what would happen to
him.

Reflection

This is more or less the reflection I used at the midweek service this week... I apologise but there is no reflection in the Sunday service as such as we are sharing a intergenerational communion. We start with the story of the midwives, but we don't end there. I'll say a little about that later but here is where we begin...

The story of two midwives... but not just any midwives... This is Shiphrah and Puah... the Hebrew midwives... or midwives to the Hebrews... It could be either... The Torah doesn't make it clear... and Jonathan Sacks always said... when the Torah doesn't make it clear... there's a reason...

One phrase suggests they are Hebrew women... the other... they are midwives to the Hebrews... i.e. Egyptian women who look after the Hebrew mothers...

That's probably a bigger point than we might at first think...

These two women are also named... when Moses's mother, sister and the daughter of Pharaoh are left unnamed... yet arguably play a bigger role in things... interesting...

But maybe it is these two women... who truly play the bigger role... The Egyptians are up to high doh because the Hebrews are flooding the country... It feels like they are taking over... They breed like... well you get the idea... the same idea that has shaped major decisions in our own country over the last decade... This is not an unfamiliar story...

So, Pharaoh summons the midwives... scary... Pharaoh is god remember... If these women are Hebrew, they'd fear their lives... If they were Egyptian... they'd fear their lives... and he tells them to kill all the boys...

But despite this order... the Hebrews keep increasing in number... 'How?' Pharaoh asks them... you can see Pharaoh, red in the face trying to understand... him thinking they are daft... while they are the ones about to pull a complete blinder on Pharaoh...

And here it is... the midwives are all scandalised and offended... "It's not possible... sire... because they breed like the animals they are... They are so unsophisticated... so primitive... they hardly need help in birth... they all just pop out before we get there" ... Again not exactly what they said but exactly what they implied with their answer to Pharaoh...

Which just fed Pharaoh's prejudices about the Hebrews... These Hebrews as so beneath us... they are just wild animals... It was a ridiculous prejudice... but not so far from some of the prejudice over the last number of years... towards migrants...

And so, Plan B is hatched... from now on... when all the boys are born... they are to be throw into the Nile...

Do you see what is happening... This is the first recorded act of civil disobedience in the Bible... the first ever perhaps... These two midwives... are named... because they fear God and not the powers of the world... They rather stand up to them... lie to them... place themselves in danger to them... and so important and significant is this... the Bible names them...

Because clearly what they did... according to the keepers of this story... not the birthing of the children... but the civil disobedience... is worth being named for... it is an act of moral bravery...

These two characters... and let us never forget their names... since they are the first of a mighty group who have spoken truth to power... and chosen to act with universal justice rather than the law of the ones who name themselves gods of this world...

Shiphrah and Puah... are performing an act of justice... We don't know if they are Hebrew or Egyptian... and that is the point... justice isn't cultural... or limited to one group... nation or people... it is universal... just as *in*justice is universal...

And that... to me... is why Shiphrah and Puah are named... They are examples... the prime examples... in that they are the first in the faith story... of people who disobeyed a small law for a bigger morality... who saw beyond what was a local prejudice... and lived instead in the name of universal justice...

They are taking on the gods of **this** world... with the support and intent of the God of **all** worlds...

Epilogue

There is a wee extra bit in the story which links us to communion... The word used for the basket Moses was put in... is repeated in only one other place in the Bible... There are thousands of baskets mentioned ... in Pharaoh's dreams to children with loaves and fish... people being let down from windows to baskets of first fruits presented to God... But the word for Moses' basket is only in only one other place and that is the word for Noah's ark... The ark and Moses' basket... the same word...

Now does that not tell us something... about salvation... about a rescue into the future... a promise about tomorrow... a moment where God's promises are set in stone...

And when you turn to the church... and the table... a metaphor for which is of a boat... It is Greek... it is not the same word... but the communion table? ... a place of promise... a place of salvation... a place where God's covenant is set... into the future...

And in the muddle of these three stories... we break bread on Sunday...

News

Prayer

Holy God
For all the risk-takers
Who dare to hold onto justice
Who are so free in this world
That they are not tied to the earthly gods of power
Or their authority
Or their threat
We pray

For the children of the world
Who are shaped by the choices being made now
In the context of conflict
And environmental threat
And populism
Tucked into silos of prejudice and fear
We pray

For the people who see a justice
Beyond the local rules
Placed there to maintain order
And keep our imaginations dulled
But a justice that sets us free
To be fully ourselves
And loved by each other
We pray

For those being taught
In a western world that has lost its identity
Unsure of what it is becoming
Unravelling its institutions and traditions
And where there is no long story being told
No legacy of faith or morality or values
We pray

For families and friends
Those ill and recovering
Those unemployed or without self-worth
And the longing for community again
Trust again
Fun again
We pray

Hear our longing
Hear our prayers
Hear our words of hope

In those who take on the world
And wrestle from it
The way of justice
The way of light
The way of love

So be it
Amen

Benediction