

13 Pentecost A

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Rev. Chana and I were both invited to a baby shower last week, and, being priests, we both brought little religious books for the new baby—mine was about baptism, and hers was about the little sheep who gets lost and Jesus goes off to find. Two priests bringing religious books was a little on the nose, but it got me thinking a little about the different ways that we teach the faith to kids in a way that is age-appropriate but also still genuine. Our soft area is full of wonderful tools to teach our faith to the youngest Christians, and each week of the year, there is some kind of enrichment activity that teaches the stories of Jesus and the disciples, St. Paul and the early church, the creation and the flood—Moses fleeing from Egypt, Adam and Eve. We try to get about six thousand years of literature and history into some kind of form that will make sense to the kiddos.

The kids' books available when I was little weren't quite as varied as what are available now. I was limited to a Children's Bible, which I still have somewhere. On the cover of my children's bible was a Jesus who looked like he had just finished protesting the Viet-Nam war—with sun-kissed flowing locks as well as a suspiciously surfer-like physique. Still, I was able to learn the stories of the faith,

and here I am, many years away from childhood, still pouring over scripture and sharing it with others.

Even though I had the benefit of Bible stories and pictures, somehow I didn't hear today's Exodus story until I was an adult. I knew about Moses being placed in the basket in the river, and I also knew about Pharoah's daughter who adopted him into the royal family of Egypt. What I didn't know is that there were two midwives—Shiphrah and Puah—who not only were given names in the Bible, which isn't always guaranteed for women—but that they change the course of history and ensured a future for an entire people. Without these two women, there is no Moses. There is no Exodus. There is no Canaan, no judges, no prophets, no John the Baptist, no Jesus. These women, by their faithfulness, set the stage for the entire drama that we still participate in millennia later. So, why are not as commonly known as Moses or Elijah, or Ruth, or Esther?

I'm not sure, but I have a few guesses. Shiphrah and Puah were doing work that I don't think has always been as valued. It was work by women and for women. And it was maybe even a little distasteful to some more refined religious folks over the years. It might also be that the author sets them up in service to Moses—the one who would confront Pharoah, who would bring the plagues, who would rescue the people. I mean, Moses parted the Red Sea, and It's pretty hard to compete with that, rhetorically.

So, I think I know why Shiprah and Puah haven't been put in stained glass or children's stories for most of history, but I want to try to make a case for why I think they should be.

A prominent Bible scholar, Walter Bruggeman, who as an aside once gave a fantastic sermon from this very pulpit, pointed out that Pharoah in the Exodus story has no name. Lots of other people in the story have names. But Pharoah is known only by his title. And Brueggeman suggests that this is because the hearer is supposed to glean that Pharoah is not limited to one place at one time. Every time has its Pharoah, and every place has its megalomaniac. In this day and age, we are a bit spoiled for choice.

Imagine a god-king of lower Egypt whose word is law and whose mandate to rule comes from heaven itself. And now imagine two poor women called into his court to answer for the crime of disobedience. They were ordered by Pharoah to kill the children of the Hebrew women who were born in Egypt. And instead, they smuggled them away, and the Hebrew people flourished, even in captivity. And even though their bravery was extraordinary, I know that the headlines will be about Moses. His story is flashier. His story make it into the children's bibles.

But the thing is, I, Ian, priest in the church of God, don't have divine magic at my fingertips like Moses. I wasn't raised in a palace like Moses. I haven't been

confronted by a burning bush like Moses. I'm just regular old me. But then again, so were the midwives. Regular but called by God.

Shiphrah and Puah had was the courage to align their lives with the will of God, even when that alignment brought them into conflict with Pharoah. They put their bodies between the power of the king and the survival of the vulnerable. And they won. Today, their names are a prayer. Today, Pharoah's name is a curse.

Something to note before I close: It's the story of the midwives. Plural. Shiphrah and Puah. They answered God together. They fought Pharoah together. They saved the people together. They need to be included in the children's bible, together. And I find that to be a piece of grace this morning, because I have never liked to follow God's will alone. I am not really brave enough, and I get lonely easily. They were partners in the work. And you are my partners in the work. We might not have all the flashiness of Moses, but I bet we could ruffle some powerful feathers together if we put our minds to it. And then two becomes four, becomes ten, becomes fifty, and before you know it, we are a whole church, a whole community, who stand up for what is right in this world.

I don't need to take you through the headlines. You know them. I don't need to show you photos of the need in our community. You've already seen them. God doesn't weave us together on Sunday mornings so that we can have more friends

and sing nice songs—though of course those are all great in their way. God weaves us together to create shelter for the vulnerable in our time, just as the midwives were a shelter for the vulnerable in theirs. The grace is that they were called hand in hand. Our grace is that we are called hand in hand. So join me in making some new stories our kids can be proud of. And maybe we can make sure that Pharoah has another really, really bad day. Amen.