

## “Daughters the Saviors”

Rev. Greg Watling

First Congregational UCC, Gaylord, MI

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Texts: Matthew 12: 2-12 Exodus 1:22; 2:1-10

Things looked bad for this young Hebrew woman who had successfully hidden her newborn son for three months. We don't know why the three-month mark was the timing for her to put him into the Nile, but maybe he was getting too big? Maybe someone started to ask questions? Maybe he was getting louder? I can't imagine someone louder than a crying infant, but perhaps... For whatever reason, this young woman used the very instrument that was to kill her son to save his life (Pharaoh the King had ordered all infant children to be thrown into the Nile River to perish).

Another woman, for reasons we cannot know for sure, decides to rescue the child and eventually to take him as her own. She, an Egyptian princess, knows full well that Hebrew children are to be killed, not saved. And yet, she brings him into her home blatantly and publicly defying the edict of her father, the King.

Another woman makes sure that the Hebrew woman called to nurse the young child is the child's own mother.

As Terence Fretheim notes in his commentary on this passage: Daughters are the saviors of sons. Both Hebrew midwives and Egyptian princess are agents of life and blessing in the created order.

Where's God in this story? Good question as God is never mentioned in this story (Fretheim). God works in and through human beings to preserve [the baby] alive. The entire fate of not only the baby, but the whole liberation of the Hebrews, rests on human action and activity. In one of the most violent regimes in human history, God is never mentioned in these acts of treason carried out, especially by the princess. "These human beings could have failed, and God would have had to find a different way into the future with the possibilities then available. The nonmention of God must be given its full weight" (Fretheim).

Before we proceed further, I want to give you a couple of definitions that are helpful in this story: 1) The Hebrew word for mercy, according to Belden Lane, author of *The Great Conversation*, is *rachmim*. It is the motherly love of a woman treasuring the child born of her own body. The princess in our story certainly practiced *rachmim*, saving the boy's life and taking him as if he were

born of her own body. 2) The Hebrew word for basket used in this story, is the same word used as that for Noah's ark. Moses is parallel to Noah (Fretheim). 3) The name Moses itself has several etymologies, including From the Egyptian noun *mes*, child, or from (1) *mo*, water, and (2) *uses*, saved from drowning and from the Hebrew verb משה (*masha*), to extract from water, or the noun משה (*mashe*), a loan (source: Abarim Publications). The princess practices *rachmim*, or mercy by taking the child from Noah's ark, saving him from drowning, but as a loan.

While there are many key players to this story, all of them women and all of them seemingly without power, I want to concentrate on the princess. What made her do this? We can figure out Moses' mother's desperation. We can know Miriam's desire that Moses be safe and nursed by his own mother. But what would it take for someone to do what the princess did? She is no Hebrew. She is not, by the early old Testament definition, a woman of God. You might even call her the enemy if you want to. And yet, in this world of violence created mostly by men in power, these women, especially this princess, "shut the violence down" (Fretheim). I believe she did it at great risk to herself as well. She knew this was a Hebrew child. She knew her father's edict. She knew what her responsibility was, but instead she practiced mercy.

Our world today is full of violence again. When I'm writing this sermon, I have no idea what Wednesday will bring in Washington or around the country. I know that we have done little to really address the problems of race, poverty, inclusion, and safety for all. Something will happen that will again spark needed protests that call our morality into question. People may be literally caught in crossfire, although sometimes being caught in the metaphorical crossfire is no picnic, either. All kinds of people are defining who the enemies are, and more and more, we've identified the enemies and they are us. It's like we're in a circular shooting gallery, literally or figuratively, and little is done to stop the violence. We all call on God to do something, but God even left the future of the Exodus of the Hebrews to human persons. This whole story would have ended had the princess given the order to throw the baby into the river as she was supposed to that day.

I do not mean to say that God was not involved in the story at all. God moved in this section in "unobtrusive, unlikely and vulnerable ways. Hence, it may be said that the ironic mode fosters a sense of hope amid any situation in which God seems to be absent. What appears to be a hopeless time is actually filled with positive possibilities. But it takes faith, "the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1), to perceive that God is at work" (Fretheim). Now let's look

at today. I only have clues, not answers to our present situation. But I do believe much of what happens here depends on us. Maybe three people set the course for a new world to emerge? How unlikely do you suppose the events of Moses' rescue were in his day? We give up too quickly. We throw in the towel. We refuse to participate thinking ourselves too small to make a difference. Are we really smaller than two slave girls and a princess?

To make a future, we must hear and comprehend the voices of those on the margins. At the same time, we need the participation of the privileged. The story for this morning completely unravels if each of the women does not fulfill their role in it. I don't know that a new president will be the one who makes things better. I don't know that it will be senators and congresspeople. It may be others among us who are privileged, which is all of us listening here, participating hand-in-hand with the marginalized. Now before you get all defensive about me saying you and I are privileged; I invite you to ask yourself why we get so defensive about something that is simply fact. Privilege doesn't mean we didn't have a hard time growing up, or in business, or in our families, or anything else about it. Being privileged doesn't mean you had it easy. What it means is that you and I had help not available to others. We had barriers, but not as many. We weren't immediately judged based on our race or economics. And whether you

agree with me or not about our privilege, you are needed in finding solutions to our constant need for violence in thought, word, and deed. Violence never really solves anything. If you need proof, watch these three women in non-violent protest each doing their part to change the course of the nation of Egypt, the Hebrews, and the individual families.

The time is now for each of us to find our role as daughters (and sons) who would be saviors. I don't mean go and save the world, I do mean do your part and let God do the rest. Find someone you disagree with and talk **WITH** them. That means listening as well as talking. Almost everyone in this country is so busy yelling that few if any are listening. Some of what you hear will hurt you, make you defensive, and maybe even make you deal with parts of your own life you'd rather avoid. Far more often, you will hear hope, possibility, and perspective. Challenge yourself to be challenged by another. Practice mercy, which literally means to take the person you are speaking with as if they were from your own womb.

While it's good and right to call out violence in every form. It's far more effective to choose not to participate in it. Non-violent resistance has always

been the best method for lasting change. It's the Jesus method. It is our calling.

Amen.