

Worship with McClure United Church

August 23, 2020

Welcome and Announcements

Welcome to worship with the McClure United Church community.

It is my prayer that what is offered here today will be a blessing to you as you live out your call as a disciple of Jesus.

For those I haven't met my name is Debra Berg and I am one of the ministers at McClure United Church.

McClure United church is a busy church and we want to focus the Thursday's in August on those who are in need.

This past Thursday we had a Garden Share which was great fun. I love how gardeners are so proud of their harvest and so eager to share and those of us who don't have gardens are so very grateful for the sharing. Thank you to everyone who participated.

This next Thursday the 27 we will be set up once again in the parking lot and we will be collecting "new" in package underwear for the Light House 6-8pm in the church parking lot.

And if you would like to make a cash donation - make the check out to McClure United Church and mark it "Being Church" and it will be forwarded to the Crisis Nursery. All this information is on our Facebook page as well as our website.

We are a busy church – we have managed to keep parts of the church open for 12step programs. The church office is closed due to Covid however there are folks checking phones and emails and taking care of donations. The mail is being brought in daily and of course if you would like to speak to me please don't hesitate but to call. I am still working from my home office and can be reached there. You will find my number in a variety of places like the website or through the message on the church's phone.

Thanks to Brenda Knisley for reading scripture this week and to the Powell family for offering their gift of music.

Shirley Blackburn, our music director is always excited to have folks volunteer to offer music for Sunday worship so if you can help out please give her a call.

Opening Prayer

As we move into a time of worship I invite you imagine a holy place. Perhaps this place is exactly where you are in this moment. Perhaps it is far away. Perhaps it is noisy and filled with activity or quiet and calm. Perhaps it is filled with chairs or pews or shady trees or rustling grasses.

We light this candle acknowledging the gift of holy places and the joy that wherever we are God's love is present to nurture and to make us strong.

(light candle)

Prayer:

God of love, here we are, ready to celebrate you and this day!

Open our minds to possibility.

Open our hearts to love freely.

Open our hands to each other.

Teach us your way. Amen.

Scripture

Exodus 1:8-13,15 - 2:10

A reading from the Book of Exodus.

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."¹¹ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor.¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites.¹³ The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites.

¹⁵The 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, God gave them families.²² 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."

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 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.

⁴His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

⁵The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it.⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him, “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said.⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?”

⁸Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother.⁹ 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.¹⁰ When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, “because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

May God bless to our understanding and our living these words of holy scripture. Amen.

Reflection

(parts inspired by Rev. Dr. Anna Carter Florence)
Exodus 1:8-14 - 2:1-10

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

What a great story.

Pharaoh makes chaos, mother makes ark.

Princess finds baby, sister brokers deal.

Baby saved, Pharaoh foiled.

A great story, and fantastic roles for girls, I might add.

Not quite "The Bible meets Frozen," but almost. So before we get into it, I want you to notice two things. The first is that the main characters are young people and their parents aren't around. That's important, because this is a story about what happens when the young people are in charge. The second is that without this story, without these two girls in the reeds, there is no Moses. There is no Exodus. There is no liberation for the people of God - the young people set things in motion.

So you've got your two pretty typical roles for girls here: beautiful princess and responsible big sister. You can pick either one; they're both good parts, even for you guys who are listening out there; just--use your imagination. You can be Pharaoh's daughter, clad in silks, dipping your lovely toes in the cool green water, or you can be Moses' sister, alone in the reeds, keeping watch over your basket by day and by night. You can be the powerful princess or the smart and resourceful sister. Like I said, you can't lose; they're both strong characters. And while the text doesn't tell us exactly how old they are, whether they were teenagers or twenty-somethings or even younger, what it does tell us is that each of them had an inner radical, just waiting to be unleashed. Each of them was ready to set aside what she should do, and work together on what they might do, which is what happens when you're down in the reeds.

I want to walk through some of the story with you. It's familiar, but you know how scripture is: you hear it differently over time.

So you know the context: we're in Egypt, a world superpower in those days, and the Hebrews are the Egyptians' slaves. But the Hebrew population is growing. It's big enough to make Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, feel

threatened and worried that soon these people will be almost as numerous as his own. So Pharaoh comes up with a highly effective and unspeakably evil plan to control them. He targets the boys. Every Hebrew boy baby that is born, is to be pitched into the Nile. Pharaoh is sure he knows how to rid his nation of a potential threat.

Moses is born into this cruel time and of course, Moses is a boy, and so his mother did what she could: she hid him for a while. But babies grow. And when she could not hide him anymore, Moses' mother, this daughter of Levi, does a priestly act. She takes a bunch of papyrus, loams it with the ancient equivalent of Kevlar, and makes a snug little ark for her three-month-old son. It's a brilliant act, a symbolic act, designed to save life as well as to bear witness. And it is heartbreakingly limited. A Kevlar ark can't save a child for long. He has one day, maybe two, before he will die of exposure; one day, maybe two, to live.

With that, the mother leaves the scene. And it is the sister who takes over from here. That's what big sisters do: they watch, when the parents leave. They report back. It may not be what they choose to do, but it's their job, as part of the family. It was this sister's job. Stand at a distance and see what happens to your brother. Be the girl in the reeds, and then come home. Enter Pharaoh's daughter. She had a different agenda. She came down to the river to take a bath. She came down to get away from it all: the court, the publicity, the pressure, the pedestal. Being beautiful is a tough job. But that's what princesses do - It's their job, as part of the family. So she takes her maids, to the river, and she anoints that lovely skin because we need her to look good this afternoon. Be the girl in the reeds, and then come home.

So here they are: two girls in the reeds. Two girls who know what they're supposed to do. Hide and watch. Bathe and dress. Do as you're told and come home. And they might have done it and never even met one another; but, you know, the reeds are a watery, slippery, in-between sort of place. Anything can happen down in the reeds to upset your balance, and on this day, something did.

You know what it was. The princess found the baby. The Egyptian princess found the Hebrew baby. You know what she was supposed to do with it. ///So did she. ///So did the sister. But wait now this is real? What do you

do with a “real” baby in a basket when you're down in the reeds, at the river's edge, and the parents, your parents, are nowhere to be found?

The princess knew what her father would have done, or at least what his law decreed. If this was a Hebrew male child, and it was, she was supposed to tip over the basket and let that baby tumble into the water. At the very least, she was supposed to close the lid, give the ark a little push, and send it on down the river for someone else to deal with. That's what the law required, like it or not. And she was supposed to uphold it.

The sister knew what her mother would have wanted. If someone found the baby, even if that someone was an Egyptian, the sister was supposed to keep watching, as awful as things might get. She was supposed to stay in her hiding place, so she wasn't seen, and she wasn't caught, and then reported to her mother all that had happened. That's what times like these required, like it or not. And she was supposed to just try and survive.

Two girls in the reeds with a little body in between them. They knew what their parents would have wanted. And you know what? They didn't do it. They couldn't. Things look different when you're down in the reeds and you have to think for yourself.

One girl, pausing over unspeakable evil, encourages another one to stand with her. "This must be one of the Hebrew's children," said the princess, speaking out loud what is the truth before her, and then the sister got an idea. "Do you want me to find a nurse among the Hebrew women?" she asked, stepping out from her hiding place. "Do you want me to find someone to nurse that child--for you?"

And just like that, they had a plan. A plan to save one life, no matter what their parents thought of it. And it was about the craziest plan you could think of, to take baby Moses back to his Hebrew mother for a few years and tell everyone it was just fine because it was on Pharaoh's daughter's orders: really. But they did it, and they got away with it, and when Moses was older, the princess actually adopted him. She took him into the palace and she raised him there, with her father down the hall; and Lord only knows what he thought about this whole arrangement. Scripture never says a word about that. But as we said, this isn't a story about the parents, and doing what they told you, even if your Dad is the Pharaoh. This is a story

about the young people, doing whatever crazy thing they can dream up together to get the bodies out of the reeds.

So now I'm wondering about you. I'm wondering what's going on where you live, during one of the most surreal years this world has ever had. I don't think I'm overstating it to say that we are in the reeds, - the death of George Floyd has brought up all these things we haven't wanted to talk about, like why does racism have such a grip on us, and what are we going to do about it, and how on earth are we going to have conversations without shutting each other down? What do you do when you're there, in that muddy, down in the reeds place? How do you keep listening, and talking, and praying?

I think this story has some things to say to us in our day. If we bring these two girls to the streets where you and I live, and ask them to show us some new ways to be?

Maybe one of the first things they'd say is We don't have to read the world the way our parents read it. There will come a day when we are down in the reeds and our parents aren't there, and we have to decide for ourselves about what we are going to do about this situation, this interruption, this baby in the basket, this Syrian child on the beach, this black man murdered, this aboriginal woman missing. And if the way we've been taught to read the world tells us that it doesn't matter - that we can turn and walk away - then something has to change; and it's up to us.

And maybe the second thing they'd say, these two girls, is, if you're down in the reeds, and you don't know what to do next, start by telling the truth about what you see. Sometimes, that is the most radical thing we can do, just to tell the truth about that body in front of us. "This is one of the Hebrew's children." Say it, say it out loud, because one truth calls forth another, and you never know who may be listening. You never know who may be waiting for a reason to come out from their hiding place to stand with you, and make a plan to save one life.

And maybe the third thing they'd say, these two girls, is that this is how liberation starts. God's liberating work starts down in the reeds, with an interruption we didn't expect, and a body we have to acknowledge. God's liberation of a people can start with two girls and one really crazy idea.

That's it; that is all you need. Because whenever the children of God claim the freedom to re-imagine and remix the world--well, then, Moses can grow up. The Exodus out of slavery can begin.

And I tell you what: we all need to leave Egypt. Our modern day Egypts. It's the next chapter of a perfect story. Let's write it together. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Loving God, we enter this sacred conversation called prayer, seeking the ways you can enliven us for faithful living.

So often, we come to you with a longing for you to take over, for you to do the heavy lifting, for you to rescue us from all that may challenge or harm.

Inspired by the Princess and the Sister – even the midwives in our lesson today we ask:

That you bless us with a restless discomfort about easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may seek truth boldly and love deeply.

Bless us with holy anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people, so that we may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people.

Bless us with the gift of tears, to shed for all who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish, so that we may reach out with hands of comfort and transformation.

Bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we really can make a difference in this world, so that we are able, with your grace and strength, to do what others claim cannot be done.

These blessings for which we yearn – hard blessings of restless discomfort, of holy anger, of tears, and of foolishness – may they ever be watered by Jesus' example of self-giving love.

We pray as followers of Jesus, who taught us to pray saying.

Our Father and Mother - who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Blessing

Friends let us go into this week

Open to the liberating energy of our God.

Let us see with new eyes and

let us speak the truth to all we meet.

We go in the light of our Parent God,

The rebel son and

the relentless spirit.

Amen.