

Exodus 1:8-2:10; Psalm 124;  
Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20

Grace and peace to you from God who is, who was, and who is to come.

At the Saturday night service, we've been doing something a little bit different this summer. You might have noticed that we had a really long first lesson, and if you were at the 8:15 service or if you were to get up now and go to the 11:00 service, you would notice that they have a different first lesson. The lessons that we are using at the Saturday night service we are using what they call the "semi-continuous reading" lessons. So for the last couple of months at Saturday night we read through various sections of the book of Genesis. Last week we finished up with the book of Genesis, all 50 chapters. We started with the universe being created; then we then had the earth being washed; and the covenant being given. We found that Abram and Sari became Abraham and Sarah who gave birth to Isaac, who in turn fathered Jacob. Jacob, who later became better known as Israel, and Jacob/Israel had at least 12 sons due in part at least to the Egyptification of his son Joseph the entire family moved from Canaan into North Africa. Joseph died, is embalmed, and is buried in Egypt. Thus endeth the book of Genesis.

So today, we begin the book of Exodus. The first few verses, which we didn't read today, remind us that the children of Jacob were fruitful, multiplied, and grew exceedingly strong, so the land was filled with them. You might remember that when Joseph moved to his family Egypt, he was so high up in the Egyptian government — he was second only to Pharaoh — that Pharaoh gave to Joseph and his family a particular section of land in Egypt. That was theirs to settle down and multiply and grow. Now we don't really know how long this lasted — from the end of the book of Genesis to the time when our reading begins today — but we know that it is long enough for the new Pharaoh to become concerned about the number of Hebrews there were in Egypt. As we heard in our reading this morning, "a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph." (v8) Of *course* he didn't know Joseph, because by that time in the story Joseph had been **dead** a couple of a hundred of years anyway.

The Pharaoh doesn't know Joseph and he is concerned about all these Hebrews who are multiplying. The end of the Genesis talks about the fact that Joseph and his family numbers about 70. We have to figure that they were at least several thousand, if not even a hundred thousand or more by this time. But Pharaoh is getting paranoid. Too many Hebrews might get to outnumber the true Egyptians. I mean, they brought in this one Hebrew guy, Joseph, and it is like all at once the flood gates open. So what if they are in the "service industry," being forced to do the jobs that no real Egyptian would want: they are the interlopers, the immigrants. We didn't ask them to come here. So Pharaoh does what any logical, compassionate, home-ruler would do. Genocide. Let's kill these critters.

Pharaoh tempts to enlist the aid of the Hebrew midwives, but these women know which side of the grave their heart lies with, so instead of killing the boys, they choose to lie to Pharaoh. I have to give these women some credit, because they stand up to Pharaoh and tell him a bold face lie.

‘Why aren’t we killing these Hebrew boys? It is because these Hebrew women are not like these Egyptian women who are soft. These Hebrew women are popping those babies out before we can even get there.’ So Pharaoh issues a national decree. It is now the civic duty of every Egyptian to throw a newborn Hebrew male into the Nile. What is this guy *afraid* of?

Meanwhile, an unknown Levite male marries an unknown Levite woman and she gives birth to an unknown male child, who she then in turn hides for three months. When she can no longer do that, she builds him a waterproof basket and sets him afloat in the river and big sister, who is also unnamed, is off in the distance watching. Lo and behold along comes Pharaoh’s daughter. She finds this basket, opens it up, and exclaims “a new pet! I have something to play with!” She knows the law, she is the Pharaoh’s daughter, she recognizes this is a Hebrew kid; she knows what is supposed to happen, but she bends the rules and saves the child.

The big sister comes running up and says, ‘Oh, Oh, should I get you a wet nurse?’ and she is told to go get her a wet nurse. So of course, this wet nurse turns out to be none other than the biological mother of this little boy floating in the basket and the biological mother gets paid to take care of, to nurse, and to clean and feed this child who is her own. (How many women would like to get cash money to change diapers?) Finally then, for the first time since the midwives, we get a name. Because Pharaoh’s daughter names her new pet, this Hebrew boy, Moses. This is a real strong, Hebrews name: Moses. Except that it is **not** a *Hebrew* name. Moses is a name which is usually reserved for **Egyptian royalty**. Moses in Egyptian means ‘to be born’ or ‘a son.’ Moses is the name of many of the Pharaohs and other ruling class people in Egypt. Here is this Egyptian woman knowing that this child is a Hebrew child is supposed to be crocodile fodder and she names him Moses.

It is also a little bit of a play on words because the Egyptian word Moses sounds a little like the Hebrew word *Mosheh* or *mashah*, which is Hebrew for ‘to draw out,’ and Moses was ‘drawn out’ of the water. What is Moses going to? Well, later on in his life he is going to ‘draw out’ of the Hebrew people their faith. He is going to ‘draw out’ the ire of the Pharaoh as he tries to get his people out of Egypt. It is a big play on words. It is kind of like after a difficult and expensive birth in a hospital from someone in a well-to-do family gives their child the very wonderful, but very formal name of William. But due to the expense of the birth, at home they call him informally Bill.

So what do we get out of this passage? If you read ahead in the story (which you can do) and if you come on Saturday evening, we will talk about Chapter 7 next week. If you know the story, you know that Moses is going to grow up in the court of Pharaoh, and he is eventually going to become the bane of Pharaoh. Not his adopted mother’s father, but the heir to the throne. There is a good possibility that as Moses is being raised there in Pharaoh’s court, he is actually being a peer to the one who is going to become Pharaoh—the one who is going to go toe-to-toe with.

I think in our passage here, we get a couple of things. First of all we see a very fine example of that old adage from the British Lord John Acton who is quoted as saying, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corruptly absolutely.” Because Pharaoh had power. He had power over all of Egypt, but instead of recognizing his power and directing that power to do good, he uses that power against the people that he saw as a threat. The only reason that they were a threat

to him was because he was abusing, enslaving, mistreating and killing them. That is not a real good way for a follower of the Lord God Almighty to act. But then again, pharaoh is NOT a follower of the Lord God Almighty.

Another thing that we learn is that it is better to fear God than it is to fear humans. Those two midwives that were named, the ones who stood before Pharaoh, the ones who lied to Pharaoh, because they feared, loved, and followed God more than they feared, loved and followed their earthly, political human leader. Which leads me to wonder, who is it that I fear and love and follow?

We've got this baby, who is supposed to be dead, being raised by his biological mother. She will then in turn hand him over to the Pharaoh's daughter, the Pharaoh who is calling for this child's death. Did you notice where God was in all this story? The only time we hear mention of God, is when the midwives are standing before Pharaoh. It is only mentioned that they feared God, that they loved God more than they did Pharaoh. God is implied, God is not overt. How is that for a way to live out our lives? To not shove our own system of belief down someone else's throat.

Now, the Brock family went on vacation this past week. Summer camp finally ended, Marianne doesn't have to live at Nawakwa for the rest of the year, and we all started to live not only in the same county, but under the same roof once again. This happens every year at the end of August! We have to learn how to deal together as a family. This year we went to Philadelphia. We have been to Philadelphia at various times. Both of our sons have been to Philadelphia in fourth grade with school classes and Marianne grew up to PA and has been there numerous times. I have been there a few times. I can tell you about Springfield, IL and Abraham Lincoln, but Philadelphia not so much.

We stayed downtown in a wonderful hotel. We parked the car Tuesday and walked everywhere. We didn't get back into the car until Thursday. It was fun to see these wonderful historical places. As I was listening to the numerous Park Service guys, I was reminded of the juxtaposition of faith and freedom that our founders attempted to balance. As an example, I am sure that you are familiar with the phrase, "All men are created equal." Except if you are of African birth, then you are only 3/5 of a human being; if you're an American Indian you didn't count at all; and you have to have all of the correct **parts**, and ladies, you don't, you weren't even considered at all. But "all men are created equal." As we walked around Philadelphia and I was reminded that every president, up to Abraham Lincoln, was a slave owner.

We had an opportunity to have a conversation with Thomas Jefferson. (Okay, it was an actor.) As we were talking to Thomas Jefferson, and he found out that I was a Lutheran pastor, he reminded us that Thomas Jefferson was a very ardent deist. He didn't believe in the divinity of Jesus. He believed very much in a creator God, but not in a God who was really active in the world today and definitely not in God the Son. Jefferson was so much a deist, that in one point in his life, he took a copy of the all four Gospels and cut out of those Gospels all the passages that he felt were added later on by people trying to make the teacher Jesus into a divine being. It is called the Jefferson Bible.

I wondered how those men and women who were so fundamental in getting our country started, knowing full well that they would have to pay with their life, if they were caught in the treason that they were committing. I mean, who did they think they were in making this Declaration of Independence? That they were like those Hebrew midwives who stood up to the Pharaoh, who **lied** to Pharaoh because they loved their God more than they were afraid of Pharaoh. These midwives, who if they had been caught in their lies, would have to pay with their own lives for their act of treason.

So what kind of a witness in my everyday life am I, as I live and work in and around Mechanicsburg and Camp Hill. What kind of a witness of God's love and grace and forgiveness am I? How is God present in my life, the way that God was present in those midwives? How is God present in your life?

Amen.