

Sunday, August 23rd, 2020

Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost

Call to Worship

One: God's mighty acts among us are well known.

People: We are a people of history.

One: God's redeeming acts were seen in Christ.

People: We are a people of faith.

One: God's presence among us gives us hope and courage to effect history.

People: We are a people of vision.

One: God seeks fellowship with us in worship.

People: We are a people of prayer and praise.

Prayer of Adoration

O God, from the restless movement and hurried pace of life we pause at this time to catch the rhythms of your peace. As the still small sounds of worship fill our very souls we seek your guidance and your presence through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn 448 O God beyond all praising

Prayer of Confession

Holy God, do not let us do more if in doing less we might do it better. Do not let us acquire more if in living with less we might know you better. Forgive us for spreading ourselves thin for the sake of appearances. Permit us to amend our ways so we are able to see the child in the stable, the young boy in the carpenter's shop, the teacher on the hillside and the Christ on the cross. Amen.

Hymn 635 Brother, sister, let me serve you

Mission Capsule – World Humanitarian Day

Ravaged by almost three decades of conflict as well as recurrent droughts, Somalia's population suffers from chronic food insecurity. Lacking access to basic necessities, many are vulnerable to disease and malnutrition. In response, Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D) and Canadian Foodgrains Bank are providing vital humanitarian assistance to those in need. Pregnant and lactating women, as well as children under five, are being screened for malnutrition and receiving supplementary feeding. Additionally, the project is empowering vulnerable women with lessons about how to prevent

further malnutrition, eat a balanced diet and maintain nutrition, providing them with the tools and knowledge they need to live a life full of nourishment. **PWS&D supports food and security and nutrition**

Readings

Exodus 1:8-2:10 The baby Moses is adopted by Pharaoh's daughter.

Psalm 124 If God had not been on our side!

Romans 12:1-8 Present yourselves as a living, holy sacrifice to God.

Matthew 16:13-20 "Who do you say that I am?" asks Jesus.

Hymn 504 This is a story full of love

Sermon: **Answering to a higher authority!**

Last week we heard about Joseph, living in Egypt, receiving his brothers who have come from Canaan seeking food. This meeting is followed by Joseph requesting that the brothers bring back their father Jacob to live near Joseph.

God's family has grown immensely since the time of Abraham. As we come to the scriptures today, we hear that all those Hebrew people are becoming a problem.

"Now, a new King arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we."

In short, these Jews are immigrants in Egypt and are becoming, according to the authorities, a burden on the society and will soon want to take over the country. The new Pharaoh brings to bear a new policy in the land. As long as these Jews stay a minority they can be kept at bay, so the new policy will see Jews doing menial jobs. They can clean and cook in Egyptian homes. They can keep the public washrooms clean.

"Come, let us deal shrewdly with them or they will increase and turn against us."

So says the Pharaoh!

Don't you get the feeling that such a story has been repeated many times over even to the present day. It's a story that can be seen in a number of ways, depending on where one stands. A few years ago an American magazine ran a cartoon which showed a white American in a suit who yells, **"It's time to reclaim America from illegal immigrants!"** A Navaho next to him says, **"I'll help you pack."**

It all depends on where you are standing. That has not changed. The Black lives matter movement in the United States is seen positively or negatively, depending on where one stands. It was fear and anxiety that caused the Pharaoh to enslave the Hebrew people. He didn't care about Joseph and what he had done to save so many Egyptians from starvation.

Now, with the Hebrew people under his total control, the Pharaoh will build an empire on their broken backs as they carry bricks day after day. They are beaten and oppressed and yet somehow they still grow in number.

Racism, exploitation, immigration. These are issues that seem to continue over and over in the world. In this story today women play a significant role. They see men running the country into the ground, and the question is, "Who will stand up to Pharaoh?" There are some women who will stand up to the Pharaoh.

One sees people put down and, in order to survive, they hide their true feelings. This is a form of survival that says, "I slave for you but you don't own me." Isn't that what the Apostle Paul meant when he said that the Christian slave was free but the one who owned him was not. The slave knew that in Christ he was free.

Why? Because the slave's mind was not controlled by the owner.

The line of resistance used by the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah is to lie when ordered by the Pharaoh to kill any new baby boys. The women fear God, so ignore the order. When they are found out the Pharaoh calls them on the carpet and says:

"Why have you done this and allowed the boys to live?"

They reply, **"Hebrew women are more vigorous than Egyptian women and give birth before the midwife comes to them."**

The Pharaoh is at a loss for words and so the women are unharmed. One can imagine those women leaving the Pharaoh's headquarters smiling at each other or even giving high fives to one another.

But they lied. Isn't that wrong? Later on in the book of Exodus we will hear the commandments that God gives the people. One of those commandments is **"Don't bear false witness against your neighbor."**

It would seem that this is not the same as lying, especially lying to save children from God's own family. We encourage children to tell the truth and not to tell lies. Indeed we should expect that of ourselves in our relationships with others. The psalmist speaks against the deceitful tongue.

So what can be said in defence of Shiphrah and Puah? They lied to the Pharaoh to protect the children. It is an act of civil disobedience in extreme circumstances.

The cruelty of Pharaoh still exists. It exists wherever women are denigrated, wherever children are endangered, wherever strangers are feared and immigrants enslaved.

So is not the Bible here teaching us to stand up to cruelty? We are called to answer to a higher authority than the Pharaohs of the world. We are called to answer to God.

When Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a young theologian in Germany in the 1930's, Adolph Hitler was taking over the country. When Bonhoeffer heard Hitler speak on radio about the Aryan Clauses, he knew that he had to stand up. This clause would seek to eliminate all minorities, including Jews. In time Bonhoeffer became one of the people involved in the plot to kill Hitler, another ruthless Pharaoh.

But what about the commandment "thou shall not kill"?

Bonhoeffer apparently struggled a great deal with this issue. He never gave a clear answer but he did perhaps give a clue. He wrote at one point: **"The Penultimate concern is not as important as the ultimate concern."**

What that meant was, the next to last matter is not as important as the final matter. The final matter is God's justification by grace and faith alone. Martin Luther, the German Reformer, said: 'Sin boldly, but believe in Christ more boldly still.'

The day Bonhoeffer was to be hung, he turned to a fellow prisoner and said:

"Suppose you see a drunken madman hurling down the autobahn toward innocent people. The Christian minister can do two things. He can wait and preside over a funeral or he can try to seize the steering wheel out of the hands of the madman."

We answer to a higher authority. The Psalmist in Psalm two says:

"Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us.' He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 'I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.'

We answer to a higher authority! As God's children we do what we can, where we are, to state that God rules. God in this Exodus story is so supreme that he will infiltrate the Pharaoh's own house. A little Hebrew boy is taken from the Nile River, the very place that Pharaoh decreed that all boys were to be thrown.

The little Hebrew boy's mother floats him in a basket on the Nile to save his life. Pharaoh's own daughter finds him, empathizes with his plight, claims him and calls for a nursing woman to care for him until she can raise him as her own. She calls him Misheh, Moses, which means, "I pulled him out of the water." This begins the story of God pulling his family out of slavery. Amen.

Prayers

O God of life, you provide your people with gifts to work for your kingdom, bringing justice and peace to every land and community.

Through your Spirit, O God, you give the gift of prophesy. Help us to use this gift to speak words of justice and truth into situations where people are exploited or treated unfairly. Guide our actions so we might influence change for good in our community, and bring hope to the hopeless.

You provide the gift of serving, O God, in the person of your Son Jesus. Help us to use this gift to serve those who have been cast aside by structures of power and privilege. Increase our awareness of injustice and our dedication to work with those who suffer its effects. May the abundance we share in our country touch every life and community in this land.

God of wisdom, you give the gift of teaching. Help us to use this gift to ensure that every child has access to education and opportunity. Be with every teacher and student in the coming months as schools adapt to the challenges of Covid-19. Support creative teaching and diligent learning in all schools and places of learning.

God of hope, giver of the gift of encouragement, help us to use this gift to assist all who are facing struggles today. Bless us with words and actions to bring comfort to all who mourn, to those coping with illness, and any who feel left behind.

God of love, giver of the gift of kindness, help us to be kind to all who cross our paths, even those who anger or upset us. Teach us to be forgiving and reconciling in all our relationships. We ask these things in and through Jesus, who taught us to pray saying....the Lord's Prayer...

Hymn 637 Take my life, and let it be consecrated

Commissioning/Benediction

Followers of Christ, choose the will of God as your motivation, the words of Christ as your meditation, the promises of God as your inspiration, the work of Christ as your deliverance. Believe this: Christ is with you; Christ before you; Christ in you; Christ over you; Christ, your all in all. Amen.