



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, August 23, 2020

Fear Made Them Do It

by Garland F. Pierce

Exodus 1:8-2:10

1:8 Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.

1:9 He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we.

1:10 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."

1:11 Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh.

1:12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites.

1:13 The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites,

1:14 and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

1:15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah,

1:16 "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."

1:17 But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live.

1:18 So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and

allowed the boys to live?"

1:19 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."

1:20 So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong.

1:21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.

1:22 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."

2:1 Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman.

2:2 The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months.

2:3 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.

2:4 His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

2:5 The 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.

2:6 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.

2:7 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?"

2:8 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother.

2:9 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.

2:10 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."

The Pharaoh of Egypt abused his power by harshly oppressing the Israelites, fearing their numbers and their potential power. He and those who followed his commands went so far as to devise a plan to destroy all the male Israelite babies. The very gender and race of these infants were seen as weapons and potential threats to these fearful oppressors. Does any of this sound familiar, insecure leaders who will stop at nothing to maintain power and control rooted in fear of the other, stoking fear in others to gain support, making death-dealing policies, and authorizing extreme tactics of control that often lead to the death of innocent people whose only crime is their gender or their race? Fear is powerful.

The Pharaoh enlisted the assistance of two midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, "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." They were directed by the Pharaoh to kill their own people; but, **they feared God** and could not follow through. Because of their fear-fueled disobedience, children lived and God's plan of freedom for the Israelites was set in motion.

A Hebrew woman, Jochebed, gave birth to a fine baby boy. Fearing for his safety, she and her young daughter, Miriam, devised and implemented a plan for the child's safety, sending him forth in his little basket boat at the river bank. The fearful Pharaoh's daughter, Bithiah, finds the basket and the baby and decides to use her privilege not as a weapon but as a tool to save. She names him and ends up returning him to his mother, family, and community to nurse and nurture him as surrogates for her and giving him the privilege and power of the palace at the same time.

The fear of the Lord can summon courage to stand up against oppression. Actions fueled by the fear of the Lord can bring about life and freedom even in the face of death and bondage. Ordinary people doing ordinary things as they live their ordinary lives can take a stand and say "yes" to God and "no" to all that denies God's will for life, freedom, and salvation. Proverbs declares that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The fear of the Lord also can be the beginning of actions that lead to life and freedom for others and ourselves. Allow the fear of the Lord to lead you.

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect, and share (write down)— What has fear made you do? Of what were you afraid?

PRAY:

God of deliverance, you called Shiphrah, Puah, Jochebed, Miriam, Bithiah, and Moses to be your hands, feet, and voice in a troubled world. Teach us how to work, walk, and speak your word in a troubled world. Amen.

adapted from https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2560

ACT:

1. Is there some issue or matter which you need to address and advocate on behalf of yourself, your family, your church, or your community? Will the fear of God or the fear of possible consequences lead you? How will you act (write, call, speak up, educate, protest)? Make a plan. For those US citizens, here are some practical actions to take: Participate in the current democratic processes (voter registration, voting, completing the 2020 census and encouraging others to do so—See: <http://www.amev-alert.org> and <https://2020census.gov>.) For everyone, practice social distancing as much as possible, wash your hands often, and wear face covering to help prevent the spread of COVID-19—See: <http://www.amechealth.org>.

2. See also the activity that accompanies this devotion.

3. Revisit the Psalm 23 Challenge first issued as part of the March 22, 2020 set of resources.

Song:

Faith of Our Mothers
AMEC Hymnal, #430

1. Faith of our moth-ers, liv-ing still In cra-dle song and bed-time prayer;
In nurs-ery lore and fire-side love, Thy pre-sence still per-vades the air.
Faith of our moth-ers, liv-ing faith, We will be true to thee till death.
2. Faith of our moth-ers, lov-ing faith, Fount of our child-hood's trust and grace,
Oh, may thy con-se-cra-tion prove Source of a fin-er, no-bler race;
Faith of our moth-ers, lov-ing faith, We will be true to thee till death.
3. Faith of our moth-ers, guid-ing faith, For youth-ful long-ing, youth-ful doubt,
How blurred our vi-sion, blind our way, Thy prov-i-den-tial care with-out.
Faith of our moth-ers, guid-ing faith, We will be true to thee till death.
4. Faith of our moth-ers, Chris-tian faith, In truth be-yond our stum-bling creeds,
Still serve the home and save the Church, And breathe thy spir-it through our
deeds;
Faith of our moth-ers, Chris-tian faith, We will be true to thee till death.

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



The Christian Education Department will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.