

**SUMMARY: THE MIDWIVES' GIFT**

*Exodus 1:3-2:10*

Last week we looked at the reconciliation of Joseph with his father Jacob and all his brothers who had initially tried to kill him. Once reconciled, they were welcomed into the land of Goshen where scripture says they lived for over 400 years<sup>i</sup>. They thrived and they multiplied, but as subsequent Egyptian rulers forgot about Joseph and all he had done for them, so they came increasingly to be seen as a threat. And so the Egyptians enslaved them, started subjecting them to harsh and awful conditions. and yet they thrived. But when the Egyptian order came for their male infant children be killed, that's when the midwives stepped up and saved them! Shifrah and Puah are named as having prevented an Israelite genocide by refusing to obey the Pharaoh's command to kill the newborn baby boys.

**Who can possibly know the ultimate effect of a single act of faith?**

We're not sure who exactly Shifrah and Puah were: some Jewish writings<sup>ii</sup> teach that they were actually the nicknames given to Moses' mother Jochabed and his sister, Miriam. A Jewish commentator explains: '*Shifra*' translates as '*improvement*' and references the way Jochabed would "improve" the newborns by cleaning them by rubbing with salt, straightening their limbs. '*Puah*' means '*cooing*' a reference to how Miriam would '*coo*' to the babies to sooth them. But it's also as possible they are simply generic names given to describe the role of any midwife '*improving and cooing...*'

The point being not so much about **WHO** they were as about **WHAT** they did - or in this case - did not do! It's that they took this one act of defiant faith to stand against what was being demanded of them, and the result was the saving of the nation of Israel.

**It's true that we all face expectations others lay on us – and sometimes it's to do or to believe certain things which deep down we just KNOW are not what represents the best of ourselves, and certainly not what God would want of us! But to keep the peace, or to avoid scary confrontation/avoid risking being unpopular, we may be tempted just to 'go along' with what we KNOW is NOT right! That's NOT what those midwives did!** Sometimes the '*right*' thing to do is the very thing that will make us unpopular, make others want to judge us, it's the risky thing – the thing that may even get us into trouble! ...*what the late John Lewis called getting into 'good' trouble!*

It's what Joseph risked as he chose to keep Mary as his betrothed when *Jewish law required that if someone fell pregnant from someone else outside of marriage she could be stoned*<sup>iii</sup>. *NO! He would not do that! Deeply convinced of another truth he chose instead to stand by her, and Jesus was born.* Or it's like the Magi who chose to reject Herod's nefarious demand that they report to him once they got the details of Christ's birth. *No! They chose instead to return to their homes by another route, avoiding Herod, & protecting the newborn babe...*

**Thank God for those who have modelled that over the years:** NO, said Oskar Schindler, I will not surrender these Jews to Nazi persecution. NO, said Rosa Parks, I will not conform to the demands of a racist society! ...I will NOT sit at the back of the bus!

There are myriad stories of those whose acts of courageous faith – great and small – have made such a difference: ...lives changed/saved by others' acts of faithfulness

**I'm suggesting is that we are being urged/challenged in this text to do at least 3 things:  
Celebrate! Participate! Honor ...our Source!**

It's to celebrate all those many acts of faithful defiance - sometimes obvious, sometimes not so obvious – but like those midwives, always life-giving, life-saving! **Whose faithfulness do you still celebrate for the impact they have had and perhaps still have in your life?** Who comes to mind for you? Perhaps it's the faithfulness of those working each day within helping organizations like Teen Junction? Turning Points? The Gleaners? People's Place?

...how about those who choose to just keep on showing up at various feeding initiatives?

*I mean, for how many years did you, Joanna and Hugh, choose to spend your Sunday afternoons serving hamburgers to the homeless downtown?* I think about those working to conserve our wildlife: supporters of the Echo Conservation Society, previously the Wildlife Defence League?

These are people who are prepared to stand up *against* our society's ubiquitous demands of greed and self-preservation, choosing to act instead for the good of others, to risk whatever consequence of reaching outside of just themselves and their own self-preservation. **I wonder who you would most want to celebrate today for the effects of their acts of faithfulness in your life?**

But more than just appreciating & celebrating what others have done or are still doing, I believe we are being encouraged-challenged to join them! Remember the Edmund Burke quote that ***'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good (people) to do nothing.'***

**In today's text we're being called NOT to do nothing!** We're being called to identify with the midwives and to be among those whose faithful living stands out as a marker beacon contrasting the harsh and selfish demands of an increasingly narcissistic & godless society, pointing to what is most sacred and of God. We are to be the conduits, the catalysts, to ***Puah-coo*** at the birthing of God's kingdom on earth to come as it is in heaven, working to ***Shifrah improve*** it by defying all of whatever stands in its way.

**What, as Christ-followers – like those defiant midwives – are we being given to be and to do, in the face of whatever our contexts seem to be demanding of us:** During Covid-19 pandemic as so many seem to be increasingly cavalier – not taking all this seriously anymore, we choose defiantly to keep wearing our masks in public, to keep social distancing & all the other safety protocols even when so many don't seem to be taking this too seriously anymore...

Or perhaps it's as we are surrounded by those who seem to be ignoring or worse denying the reality of climate change? *To what action does our defiant faith call us to be and to do?*

Perhaps it's to do with some abusive relationship in which you or a loved find yourself...?

*Of course I know what everyone else expects of me, but what would those midwives have done? What am I to do? What is my most faithful, most responsible role and duty...?*

We should consider our circumstances and ask whether there is some courageous attitude we're missing, some bold action we should be taking – something we're holding back on for the fear of looking naïve, or because we're scared of any backlash that may come from those around us...?

And all the while honouring the source of our faith....

Surely all of our defiant faithfulness is epitomized by Jesus Christ whose resurrection from death stands as the ultimate act of defiance against what the world would lyingly insist is most real!

We honor how it is that **AS WE ARE IN HIM** so we become aligned with Him, and so we are given to stand up to be and to do whatever we are given to be and to do in whatever situation we may find ourselves!

**As a people who have been touched by God's grace, Christ followers, we are always called to be doing the right thing!** And so WHAT STOPS US? Perhaps, we may tell ourselves, we don't know what the 'right' thing is? Or perhaps it is fear of the consequences that immobilizes us? Or maybe we are out of touch with our moral compass, having forgotten God's voice.

No! With those midwives of old, we will NOT stand idly by while allowing the murder the newborn Hebrew babies simply to satisfy the self-obsessed demands of an insecure leader! And, as Christ followers, neither will we go against a God who demands that we take every opportunity to shine the just and loving compassion and mercy of what is right in the face of whatever is clearly NOT of God wherever we may find it!

**Jesus' resurrection secures our hope in the fact that God has got this! It's not up to us to achieve! Christ has done it! But it is up to us to express it! To live it!** May that be what our Christian witness most resembles!!!

*Dear God as we are in your Son Jesus Christ, may our lives, our working, praying our everything come increasingly to be the faithful – socially defiant - expressions of YOU and YOUR ways of loving justice, courageous compassion, healing hope and reconciling mercy that you intend us to be  
May it be so, for we pray in Jesus' Name  
Amen*

Rev Robin Jacobson

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<sup>i</sup> Wikipedia: There is conflicting information on how long Israel is to spend in Egypt: Exodus 12:40 says **430 years**, but Exodus 6:14–25 says this is made up of only four generations (Levi to Moses).

<sup>ii</sup> [https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/3555182/jewish/Who-Were-Shifra-and-Puah-the-Hebrew-Midwives.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3555182/jewish/Who-Were-Shifra-and-Puah-the-Hebrew-Midwives.htm)

<sup>iii</sup> Deuteronomy 22:20,21