

Allegiance

Has it ever dawned on you that salvation seems to come from the most surprising and unexpected of sources? It's like God actually prefers to save the world this way. Think about the story we've heard from the book of Exodus. A plain reading of this story reveals the compelling truth that the entire life and ministry of Moses hinges on the actions of two shrewd Hebrew midwives, a desperate mother, an inquisitive sister, and a disobedient daughter of Pharaoh. When we read the stories of the famous Biblical heroes, it's really easy to forget to look behind them, to the supporting players. Particularly with a character like Moses, so grand in stature and so revered in tradition, we forget to look behind and thus we fail to see the true heroes of his story. And in an age where men still seem to be the norm when it comes to heroes in fiction, film, and the like, it makes it that much more important to lift up the women in this particular story.

I'm astounded by the fact that so many women risked so much to save this child. The how, the what, and the why they did it convict me, challenge me in my life as a follower of Jesus. Fearing the rise of the Hebrew people, the newly-minted King of Egypt, Pharaoh, began to oppress the Hebrews and then, in a desperate response to their continued growth, ordered the two Hebrew midwives to kill any Hebrew boys they delivered. The power dynamic is apparent here: the ruling authority, with all the right to exercise his dominion in Egypt, orders his two slaves to kill Hebrew children for the purpose of securing Egyptian power and protecting Egyptian interests. These women, Shiphrah and Puah, have every obligation to obey their king, their master, their lord, their lawgiver. But, they refused his order, for "*the midwives feared God.*" Out of the conviction of their religious identities, they cast aside their obedience to this

king. Once Pharaoh confronted their disobedience, their shrewdness and ingenuity burst forth in what was essentially an act of deception. “[*The Hebrew women*] are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them,” they say, rather than admitting that they have chosen to ignore his commands. At this point in the story, the midwives are now plainly guilty of civil disobedience and deception. But as the Scripture says, “*God dealt well with the midwives.*” The law cast aside, and truth-telling thrown to the wind, the midwives showed themselves to be courageously brilliant women, willing to risk their own lives in order to save the lives of another even if that meant disobeying the law and bending the truth. In spite of their disobedience and deception, God was still pleased with them.

This same spirit of disobedience and ingenuity manifests itself in the life of Moses’ mother. Pharaoh had commanded that every Hebrew boy born shall be thrown into the Nile. And, in one sense, Moses’ mother did heed that order. But rather than blindly obeying the order of her king, she chose creativity instead of compliance: “*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.*” In point of fact, Moses, the Hebrew boy, did wind up in the Nile. But rather than throwing him to certain death, she saved him through creativity and shrewdness. Once again, someone refused to comply with Pharaoh’s laws. His own daughter chose to keep the child as her own when she stumbled upon him floating in the reeds. Moses’ sister, having kept a close eye on the boy, presented herself to Pharaoh’s daughter and, feigning no relation to the boy, fatefully volunteered to locate a suitable wet nurse for him. With cunning brilliance, she called her own mother, Moses’ mother, to raise the child.

These women, underdogs in a society ruled and governed by brutal men, used civil disobedience, cunning, ingenuity, and even treason, in the case of Pharaoh’s daughter, to save

this one small child. And their reasons for doing so came down to this: love for God, and love for the innocent boy. Casting aside any commitments and ‘identity-markers’ that would compel them to violence, these women chose something that fear, or citizenship, or even family ties couldn’t this Earth, their lives are striking examples of what it means to ‘bind’ and ‘loose’ as Jesus empowered his disciples to do. They chose to ‘bind’ up the strong arm of Pharaoh and to ‘loose’ the captive child Moses. Something greater than them guided their actions, determined their choices, and even when their choices put them at odds with the powers and principalities of their day, they chose creativity and compassion in the face of cruelty. They saw the world through a different lens than Pharaoh’s, and they inspire us to do the same.

So, what lens are we called to look through when we gaze upon the world? I can remember when I first heard the singer Derek Webb’s song “A King and a Kingdom.” It struck me like an arrow, and his words still ring true to me today, nearly 10 years later: “My first allegiance is not to a flag, a country, or a man. My first allegiance is not to democracy, or blood. It’s to a King and a Kingdom.” Much like the women in the Exodus account, we are a people who live with competing allegiances, many of which simply can’t be reconciled. Perhaps some of us have felt the tension between commitments to a particular way or life that put us at odds with members of our own family. Many of us are American citizens, a citizenship that expects an allegiance to certain ideals that, quite honestly, sometimes conflict with the ideals of a Gospel that transcend any national or political boundaries. Let us not forget that Jesus’ gift of the ‘keys of the kingdom’ and the powers to ‘bind on earth’ and to ‘loose on earth’ were rooted not in any earthly power, or deeply held sentiments of patriotism or citizenship. Those gifts were given in response to the confession that Jesus is ‘the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ As a Church which makes that same confession, as people given such gifts of prophecy, healing, teaching, and

the full ministry of reconciliation, I pray that we will consider what lens we choose first as we look upon the world in which we live. “My first allegiance is not to a flag, a country, or a man. My first allegiance is not to democracy, or blood. It’s to a King and and Kingdom.”