

Today we are going to read from the first couple of chapters from the book of Exodus. Over the next few weeks we are going to read through this Old Testament book. Exodus is a story of a people in transition. And our culture and many of our families are in times of transition. I don't have to tell you that.

Pretty much every one of us and our culture is moving away from one thing and moving to something different. And many of us don't have a clue about where we are heading. And that is a scary thing. It is scary when you don't know what is coming up next.

This book of Exodus is the second book of the Bible and it follows the book of Genesis. In the last part of the book of Genesis, God's family and the whole nation of Israel suffers a terrible drought. Joseph is sold off into slavery by his brothers and he ends up in Egypt.

While in Egypt, Joseph correctly interprets a dream of the Pharaoh which leads to economic prosperity for the Egyptians and so Joseph moves out of bondage and into a leadership role in the Egyptian government.

Joseph's brothers and parents come to Egypt during a severe drought because they have heard that Egypt has a large storage of grain. Joseph is reunited with his brothers and parents and Joseph's family is able to settle into Egypt where they exist for several generations. And then we pick up the story in verse 8 of chapter 1 of the book which is called "Exodus" when things go terribly wrong.

Read Exodus 1:8-2:10

A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph. Have you ever had someone make assumptions about you because they did not know you? Ever felt like someone made a judgment about you or your family or your heritage but they never bothered to get to know you? Let me tell you about a judgment that I have made.

Pretty much every day for the past ten years I have driven from Rock Hill and turned right on Hwy 274 in Newport and driven past the Sportsman gun shop and shooting range and come up to the church. Now I grew up on a farm. And both of my brothers were hunters. And my Dad tried to teach me to be a hunter. I remember sitting in a dove field on my Dad's farm and hoisting a shotgun on my shoulder and attempting to shoot at least one dove that flew over. I never hit one.

Though I am sure my brothers did not want to, Jimmy and Johnny occasionally allowed me to accompany them as they put on waders and camouflaged their boat and stood in the frigid waters on cold mornings along the swamps of the Santee Cooper Lakes in South Carolina and then in Texas and invited me to try my best to shoot a duck that flew overhead. I never hit one.

My Dad took me to the edge of the pasture and put an old rusty tin can on the top of a fence post and tried to teach me to steady my aim and shoot that can off that post. I never hit the can. Because I could not shoot anything, because I could never catch anything with a fishing pole, my life went in a different direction than hanging out with people that liked to hunt and fish and spend time in the woods. I found my solace on a golf course, a tennis court, or a soccer field.

But as I spent more and more time away from people who liked to hunt and fish, I formed stronger and stronger opinions about people who hunted and fished or who shot guns. And so the Sportsman gun shop which offers classes on concealed weapons and rows and rows of handguns became a symbol for me to vent my own prejudices as I drove by about the folks who walked into the store and made purchases or who unloaded a round in the target range.

The story we have read today is a story about someone making assumptions about a group of people because he does not understand them and he wants to use them for his own gain. The villain in the story called the king of Egypt or Pharaoh was probably one of the Pharaoh's named Rameses in your Middle Eastern history.

Pharaoh wants to consolidate the wealth of Egypt and so he targets the Israelite people, or descendants from Joseph's family, as the scapegoats that the Egyptians can beat down and abuse in order to raise up their wealth. Pharaoh decides to use the Israelites as slaves to build storehouses to increase their national surplus. This was a boom time for Egypt.

In the story we have read, we have heard the Israelites referred to as Hebrews. The term Hebrews was a generic term that was used to describe low class folks with no social standing in the society. We all have our own derogatory terms that we use to describe people that we think are lower than us for whatever reason.

I know what mine are. You know what yours are. In the Old Testament the low class people are called Hebrews. It just so happens, however, that these Hebrews are also God's chosen people.

So the king of Egypt says to the Hebrew midwives, two of which get named, that they are to kill off all of the Hebrew males. But these two midwives named Shiprah and Puah, defy the king's orders. They refuse to kill off the Hebrew boys. In fact, the Scripture we have read is filled with women who defy the powerful tyrants to carry out God's will and bring about life in the midst of death.

The Hebrew midwives refuse to kill off the Hebrew baby boys. A Hebrew mother hides her baby boy in a papyrus basket among the reeds along the bank of the river. The daughter of Pharaoh finds this Hebrew child and protects him. This daughter's maid fetches the child and then is asked to find a Hebrew woman to nurse the child.

This maid finds the Hebrew mother of this child and she is paid to raise this child. Pharaoh's daughter eventually adopts this child and names him Moses. All of these women defy the powers around them and carry out God's will to save this child's life that will eventually be used by God in a very powerful way. This is a story of God using the most unlikely of female characters to carry out God's will of life and liberation.

Earlier I mentioned that every time I drove by the Sportsman gun shop my prejudice bubbled up. I don't know if it was coincidence or if it was God's providence or if it was just good advertising on their part but our son James entered his first archery competition a few weeks ago and low and behold but who should he walk the target course with but the group of men and women representing the Sportsman wearing their red Sportsman outfits.

So here I am. A person who tends to be fairly pacifist spending a couple of hours on a Sunday afternoon with this group of men and one woman representing the place that stirs up my greatest prejudice.

I will make the next part of this story very brief. That group of men and women with shirts advertising concealed weapon training taught this pacifist fairly liberal thinker and his son one of my greatest lessons about acceptance, about inclusion, and about encouragement. Maybe it was just good advertising but I don't think so. It felt authentic and real to me.

Last week I attended another church since I was on vacation. And as I looked into the choir and noticed all of the Caucasian faces staring back at me, I found myself yearning for the experience of worship I had the week before with my AMEZ brothers and sisters. Not the three hours of worship with them mind you. I will say that that was a little overwhelming for this Southern white boy.

But what I missed last week was the experience of overcoming barriers and worshipping with a diverse group of people who were welcoming of one another. I missed seeing my white brothers and sisters in the choir doing their best to keep rhythm with their fellow Christians.

Pharaoh thought that he could purify and enrich his country on the backs of God's people who were a minority in that country. But God used a diverse group who were united by the desire to save one life that Pharaoh was very wrong. AMEN.

-Text: Exodus 1:8-2:10

-Given: August 21, 2011 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)