

Calling All Midwives

Preached at El Buen Pastor Presbyterian Church for World Communion Sunday

Exodus 1: 15-22

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other 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." But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" 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." So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. 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."

It is an honor to be among God's courageous and faithful people today, and to provide you with a word from the God who deeply cares for you. When Pastor Jorge asked me to preach, I asked him how long his sermons usually were. He said, "Thirty minutes." His wife, Anna, shook her head and corrected him, "Forty minutes!" I will not be preaching a forty-minute sermon. However, if you are used to clapping or shouting out "Amen!" during one of Pastor Jorge's sermons, I hope you feel the freedom to do so today as well. As a preacher in the white church I can tell the sermon is working when things get quieter. So please know: if you are feeling the Spirit moving, it is not rude. Actually, it is better to say something than it is to hold it in and get spiritual indigestion.

It has been said that leaders in the church these days function in one of two roles. We are either like hospice workers who help our churches die with dignity. Or we are midwives who help our churches birth something new.

If we are honest, today's church is both dying and birthing something new at the same time. When I hear people say that the church is dying, I tell them that the church isn't dying, *the white patriarchal church is dying. And that is a good thing! (Any Amens?)* But we also have the sense that God's Spirit is birthing something new and exciting. That is, if we allow ourselves to become midwives for what God is doing.

Shiphrah and Puah are Hebrew midwives whose job is to offer natal care to pregnant Hebrew women under the new Pharaoh's healthcare plan. The previous Pharaoh was decent to the Hebrew people. But the new Pharaoh is an insecure, narcissistic, racist who lacks any wisdom whatsoever (it is known to happen).

So the new Pharaoh does what all insecure leaders do: he singles out a group of people to blame for society's problems. Pharaoh sees the Hebrew's growing population and says they are the issue. He spreads lies about them being dangerous. As a way to control them, he increases their workload. He tries to tire them and crush their spirits. But to his frustration, the more the Hebrews work, the more babies they continue to have. (Apparently, the Hebrews are tired, but they are not that tired!) Defeated by Plan A, Pharaoh takes the next step: he crafts a policy ordering the midwives to slaughter Hebrew baby boys as soon as they are born. But notice he decides to leave the girls alone. Apparently, he's not threatened by the girls...but he should be. (Here is where someone could say amen!)

We know that the spirit of Pharaoh is still among us today. Still crafting policies against displaced people and their children. Still afraid of the growing number of immigrants. Still using lies as a control tactic.

But I am here to tell you today, that even though the spirit of Pharaoh remains, there is another Spirit among us.

Shiphrah and Puah, two displaced immigrant midwives, tap into this Spirit. They are ordered by Pharaoh to follow the laws of his inhumane policy, but they do not do it. And this small act of resistance births the beginning of a revolution.

Sometimes the most holy thing we can say is, "No, not on my watch!"

It turns out, Shiphrah and Puah were far more than midwives for pregnant women; they were midwives for the Spirit of God.

And as people of that same Spirit, so are we.

It's why we do not proclaim, "Pharaoh is Lord," but confess that "Jesus is Lord!"

It is why when we look into the empty tomb on Easter we do not say the empire wins, but "Love wins!"

It is why the Spirit of Pentecost fell on a multi-lingual, multi-cultural church and not on the white, patriarchal church.

Because where the Spirit of God is there is diversity.
Where the Spirit of God is there is strength.
Where the Spirit of God is there is sanctuary.
Where the Spirit of God is there is freedom.
Where the Spirit of God is there is wisdom. (Now I'm getting excited!)
Where the Spirit of God is there is hope.
Where the Spirit of God is there is peace and justice.
Where the Spirit of God is there is wholeness and community.
Where the Spirit of God is there is compassion for the stranger, more than enough for the poor, release for the burdened, reprieve for the overwhelmed, room for the immigrant, and arms waiting to embrace the weary.

Where the Spirit of God is there is a revolution born through the womb of justice, which is more powerful than any insecure, narcissistic, racist Pharaoh who lacks any wisdom could ever dream of controlling.

The power of that Spirit is here today, among you and among us.

In times of Pharaohs,
God calls on midwives
to help birth life from death.

Midwives like you,
who courageously and faithfully say,
"No, not on my watch."