



Called To Do The Right Thing

Exodus 1-2:10

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This month we have been concentrating on “called” stories from our scripture. We started with challenging a dead idea that God only calls people into ministry. We affirmed that God calls people to all walks of life, physicians, teachers, business owners, and the list goes on. Last week we widened the call a bit to imagine that there are times when the call is to be courageous. A call may not involve a vocation; it may simply be following God at a difficult moment.

This morning we expand even wider to consider that the calling of God is always to do the right thing. In a world increasingly docile and indecisive, where doing nothing is an endorsement of the status quo, God continues to speak and ask us to DO the right thing.

You may or may not have noticed a pattern. The biblical call stories have featured thus far men, Abraham, Moses, and Peter. The congregational call stories until this morning had featured only women. Today we are switching it around, using a male from the congregation can only mean we are going to read about a woman from our scripture.

Our scripture is an ancient book, written in a time when men were the only ones to read or write, and so it should be no surprise that men occupy a lot of stage time in the scripture. What

is equally surprising is that women are not ignored. They are rarely cast in major roles, but for such an old book, the bible is not afraid to show women in a favorable light.

Now, I almost choose Esther this week, she certainly rose up to do the right thing and at a most necessary time. Mary also was considered. She was called of God and lived fully into the calling. Yet, I have a fixation for the overlooked and under-appreciated biblical character. Which brings us to our scripture from Exodus.

Pharaoh is lying. Some of the people believed him; they didn't like the Jews much either. Singling out a group of people and labeling them as the trouble-makers is from page 1 of the tyrant playbook.

Pharaoh is lying. The Hebrews are not anything to be afraid of. The Egyptians are the majority, not the Hebrews. The Egyptians have weapons; the Hebrews do not. The Egyptians have economic privilege and political power, and the Hebrews do not. The Egyptians have nothing to fear from the growing minority of the Hebrews. But there is a spur in Pharaoh's saddle, so he decides a scapegoat must be sacrificed and he has decided it will be the Hebrews.

He first instructs the Hebrew midwives to kill the male children. Think about this for a moment. A man has ordered a woman, a Hebrew woman, whose task it is to bring life, to kill. They have the decree of the king; it would be legal.

So what will these women do?

They will do the right thing and lie.

"Sir, the Hebrew women, are strong –hearty women, when we are called, they have the child before we arrive, sorry." Not only do they lie, but God seems to bless them because they did the right thing. They resisted evil, they had to lie to live another day, but instead of doing nothing, instead of saying "well it's my job, I just take orders" they said, "We answer to God." We are called by God to do the right thing, even if it is disobeying the law.

Disappointed but not surprised the Pharaoh goes to plan B. He now deputizes all Egyptians to carry out the order to “throw male Hebrew children in the Nile.” There are many ways to kill a newborn son, but the instruction is clear, throw them into the river. It’s as if Pharaoh is attempting to maximize the tears.

Pharaoh wanted every woman and man to see what would happen. He wanted them to daily witness the water parade of dead babies; maybe this would stop them. In a world, without the pill or other forms of birth control, Pharaoh believed witnessing this was going to stop nature from taking its course? Love will still be made, and the anger and resistance toward the Pharaoh will grow stronger.

So now every Egyptian has the lawful right to enter your home and throw your male child in the river. It is legal, but it is still not moral. The nation of Egypt is behind it, but not God.

Nevertheless, a woman has a male child, in the midst of all this - talk about defiance. And for three months she keeps this a secret. Can you imagine the number of times she has held her hand over his mouth to muffle his cries? Can you see her when he awakes in the night pulling him close to her breast ---almost smothering him to keep the noise to a minimum? Further, can you imagine the dread she lives with each night wondering if someone will hear him and charge into her home and rip her baby from her arms? I’ve tried, and I can’t imagine the level of anxiety that must have existed, knowing that at any moment mother and son could be separated. But Jochebed does the right thing. Not the easy or safe thing, but she refuses to be a party to evil.

After three months, this strong woman will have to do the impossible - let her son go. The bond between a mother and a child is a strong one; it is possibly the most critical human bond we have.

Imagine with me how this looked. The basket is prepared and floating at the edge of the water. Jochebed is holding her baby tightly against her breast, sitting on her knees. With one hand she pulls the Ark close to the bank, and with the other, she lays her precious son, made in the image of God, into the basket. She leans over into the basket for one final kiss. She gently pushes the basket out into the reeds. She rises from the edge of the water with her skirt soiled from the dirt and water and her face wet from tears. Yet this defiant woman has a plan.

She turns to her daughter Miriam and says to her, "Watch your brother and when an Egyptian woman notices him run to her and say, "Would you like me to find a wet nurse from the Hebrew women to tend to your boy?" The mother says, "Now run and keep an eye on him." In the meantime, Jochebed does what every woman who has ever risked their child in this world would do; she prays.

So the midwives do the right thing even if it means disobeying an unjust law. Jochebed joins the society of women who do the right thing, and now young Miriam is doing the same.

Following her mother's instructions, she sees an Egyptian woman bathing who has her brother's basket retrieved. It turns out in the greatest of ironies that this is Pharaoh's daughter. She knows what is going on, "This is a Hebrew boy." She knows the law; she should take him and drown him; the law is clear. But the scripture says, "She had pity on the child." She knows what is right. Most of us have a moral compass; we know when something is unfair and unjust even if it is lawful. Most of us, however, are not willing to do something.

Following God's call should give us the backbone to do the right thing. The daughter of the paranoid Pharaoh who is worried about the lowly Hebrews does the right thing.

Miriam splashes thru the water, doing as her mother said, and says to the Egyptian, "Would you like me to find a wet nurse for the child?" And the daughter of Pharaoh winks (or so I think) at the young girl and says, "Yes, please do, I'll even pay her."

All it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing. Without these women who listened to God and heard the call to do the right thing, there would have never been a Moses. Doing the right thing can alter history. Doing nothing can do the same.

There is doing the wrong thing.

Then there is doing nothing.

Then there is doing the right thing.

If these women had done nothing, Moses would have died.

Doing nothing offers the same outcome as doing the wrong thing.

There is only one thing that needs to happen for the wrong to triumph; do nothing. Don't make any noise, go along with the crowd, the majority, the mob.

Let us not use confuse legal with moral. It was legal to persecute Jews in Germany in 1938. It was legal to apply a literacy test to African American voters to recite the constitution in 1964 in Alabama. Just because it is legal does not make it moral. It was legal to throw babies in the Nile under Pharaoh; it was not moral.

There is a reason why people do nothing; it's easy. They are praised by the majority, the powerful, and the influential. Doing the right thing does not have a fan club, and it is dangerous, and further you often must do it by yourself.

I wish I could tell you doing the right thing will make you loved and appreciated, but I cannot.

When you see someone being bullied at school for the way they look, or for their sexual orientation, or for being awkward, or not being able to dress as nice as others and you do the right thing and stand up for them or stand with them, this will not make you popular . . . But still, do the right thing.

When someone tempts you to use drugs, by resisting and not participating, you will not make more friends, but still, do the right thing.

When people are hateful to you and say untrue things about you-----still do the right thing

When people say you spend too much time with sinners and not enough time with the saints----
-continue to do the right thing

When people refuse to forgive you-----do the right thing

When people label you and call you names-----do the right thing

When the powerful say we can deal harshly with these people because they are powerless,
remember God sides with the weak -----do the right thing and speak up for the powerless.

If the forces of hate make it lawful to hate-----keep doing the right thing - there is never a
wrong time to do the right thing.

I have been marinating in this passage for weeks; I think what it says clearest is---if you are
called of God you will do something, doing nothing is not an option. In the face of cruelty,
bullying, fear, and immorality, the called of God speak UP and act UP. The patron saints of
doing the right thing are Shiphrah, Puah, Jochebed, Miriam, and the unnamed daughter. May
we remember their names and live into our own calling to do the right thing.