

Title: "Living Faith: Moses' Many Mothers"

Text: Hebrews 11:23; Exodus 1 – 2

We are continuing in our series on "Living Faith in 3D."

-And as we continue to explore what "living faith" looks like in the lives of real people,

-the writer to the Hebrews will be directing our attention this week and for a couple weeks to come to Moses.

This week we will look at Moses' birth, and the focus of our attention is not so much on Moses himself,

-but on the ones I am calling his "many mothers."

There are a whole variety of women who have a hand in birthing Moses and making sure he actually lives.

-There is Jochebed, who was Moses' actual birth mother.

-But there were also the two Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah,

-who disobeyed the Pharaoh's direct order and didn't put this Hebrew baby to death as soon as he was born.

-And then there was Moses' older sister, Miriam, who played a key role in getting Moses adopted by Pharaoh's own daughter.

-And Pharaoh's daughter who became Moses' adoptive mother.

That's a lot of women who had a hand in making sure Moses survived birth and infancy,

-and in different ways "mothered" him.

The writer to the Hebrews says in Hebrews 11:23,

"By faith Moses parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict."

We read the first part of Moses' birth story earlier in the service about that "king's edict."

-Listen now to the second part of the story from Exodus 2:1-10.

So Moses' day in Egypt was a dangerous time for Hebrew boy babies to be born.

The Israelites had been down in Egypt for almost 400 years since the time we spoke of last week,
-when Joseph had been Prime Minister of Egypt.

Joseph was the son of Jacob, who was the son of Isaac, who was the son of Abraham and Sarah.

-Through a whole series of events Joseph had ended up in Egypt and had ended up rising to prominence as Pharaoh's right hand man during a time of crisis in the nation.

-There was a 7 year famine that devastated Egypt and all of the nations of the Middle East at the time.

Joseph had stored up grain during the prior years of plenty,
-so that during the lean years of famine he had reserves to ration out to the Egyptians so they wouldn't go hungry.

And Joseph had brought his family down to Egypt from Canaan, so that they, too, would be saved from starvation during the famine.

But now it is 400 years later, and the descendants of Jacob and Joseph and all Joseph's brothers are still in Egypt.
-And they have grown more numerous than the stars in the sky or the sand at the seashore.

That original promise of God to Abraham and Sarah has been partially fulfilled.

-They are not yet a nation and they have not yet received the land of Canaan as their own,
-but the descendants of Abraham and Sarah are a massive people group now.

So massive that the Egyptians are afraid of them as a people group within their nation.

-Joseph is long forgotten, and many pharaohs have come and gone since Joseph's time.
-And the current Pharaoh sees these Israelites as a threat.

They have never really assimilated themselves into Egypt.

- They have kept themselves as a distinct people.
- They worship a distinct God.
- They marry amongst themselves.
- They don't fit in to the prevailing culture.

And so the Egyptians don't really trust them.

- And the reigning Pharaoh is concerned with how numerous they have become, and he wants to reduce their numbers.

So the Pharaoh comes up with a two part plan:

- First the Egyptians will enslave the Israelite people and put them to forced labor.
- And secondly, they will begin a policy of Hebrew infanticide, killing all of the boy babies born to the Israelites.

Pharaoh's edict to the Hebrew midwives officially read:

"Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but every girl may live."

So that was the political and cultural climate into which Moses was born.

And what did "living faith" look like in that particular climate?

- It looked like civil disobedience.

The writer to the Hebrews says, *"By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, AND they were not afraid of the king's edict."*

And as I said a moment ago, Moses' parents weren't the only ones who displayed a living faith by "not being afraid of the king's edict."

Those two Hebrew midwives, who the Bible remembers by name, Shiphrah and Puah,

- they practiced a godly civil disobedience.
- They refused to obey the king's direct order and would not put the Hebrew babies to death.

Genesis says, *"The midwives feared God and did not do what*

the king of Egypt had told them to do. They let the boys live.”

And then in the next verses it says, *“So God was kind to the midwives and the people increase and became more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.”*

That is what we call civil disobedience.

- When a law or a policy of the civil government goes against the higher laws of God,
- God-fearing people are called to obey God’s laws rather than the human laws.

And they do so knowing full well that they may need to bear the consequences of their civil disobedience.

February is Black History month in the United States.

- Go on-line and download a copy of Martin Luther King Jr’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail Cell.”
- I re-read that letter almost every February as a reminder.
- It is an modern day example of what civil disobedience looks like as an expression of living faith in God.

Shiphrah and Puah were living out that kind of faith in their day.

- As were Moses’ parents, and Moses’ sister, Miriam.
- They were all complicit in this unlawful harboring of an infant who by the king’s edict should have been drowned in the Nile River.

The midwives refused the order because they feared God.

- The parents refused the order both because they feared God and I am sure because this was their baby, whom they rightly loved.

Hebrews says they saw he was no ordinary child,

- and though it was certainly true that Moses would grow up to be no ordinary person,
- I think every parent looks at their newborn as ‘no ordinary child.’
- I thought my daughters were the most beautiful babies the world had ever seen.

They were no ordinary babies. They were amazing little creations and the gifts of God!

So I believe I would have disobeyed any government order to kill babies, too.

-But in my case, the concept is purely theoretical.

In Moses' day, the decision of Shiphrah and Puah, and of Moses' mother and father, to let this child live,

-and to hide him from the authorities was unlawful, and dangerous.

There could have been dire consequences to pay.

-Every time baby Moses cried there would have been fear in the house lest anyone hear and come nosing around.

And when those little lungs had fully developed after 3 months,

-Moses' parents knew that they couldn't successfully hide him much longer.

So they came up with this crazy plan to save their baby.

-They wrapped him up and put him in a basket that had been coated on the outside with a kind of gummy tar to keep it water proof.

Then they placed the basket in some reeds along the bank of the Nile where they knew that Pharaoh's daughter often came down to bathe.

-And Miriam, Moses' sister, who was a young girl at the time, was stationed to be innocently playing nearby to keep an eye on the basket.

And sure enough, Pharaoh's own daughter, a princess of Egypt came down to the water with her attendants to bathe.

-And just as planned, she saw the basket and had her attendants fetch it.

And when they looked inside, there was this sweet little boy baby all wrapped and swaddled.

-And it says that he was crying, and she felt sorry for him.

Which I am sure is just what Moses' family wanted to happen.

- They knew that no one seeing a little 3 month old baby is going to want to take it and throw it in the Nile to die.
- Or at least, that is what they were praying would be true.

And they were right.

- Pharaoh's daughter knew immediately that this was one of the Hebrew boy babies.
- And she knew full well that by rights and by law this baby should have been killed at birth.
- And she knew that someone had been hiding this baby for at least a couple of months by the size of it.

But she knew, too, that it would be wrong to follow her father's decree and kill this baby.

- So she, too, by God's grace, stepped in to become a participant in this joint act of civil disobedience.

And Miriam, seeing the compassionate look on the princess's face,

- runs up to her and asks the princess, "Do you want me to go and get one of the Hebrews women to nurse the baby for you?"
- And the princess decides that would be an excellent idea, and agrees.

So Miriam runs and gets her mother, Moses' own mother, to come and nurse the baby until it is weaned.

- And then Moses is taken in to Pharaoh's own house to be adopted and raised by Pharaoh's own daughter.

A lot of women were responsible for Moses seeing the light of day and being enabled to live.

- And they did so "not fearing the king's edict," but trusting in God and obeying His laws and His will.

This, says the writer of the Hebrews, is another aspect of what living faith looks like in the lives of real people.

And this kind of living faith is needed in every generation, including ours.

- God's people in every generation are called to live out this faith "in the world."

And there are all kinds of times and all kinds of ways in which the “world” will be hostile to us because of our faith in God.

- Like the Israelites in Egypt, the people of God will never quite fit in to the prevailing culture.
- We don't believe everything the world around us believes.
- We don't value everything the world around us values.
- We hunger and thirst for a kind of truth, and a kind of justice, and a kind of right-instead-of-wrong.

We are a people who are trying to love our enemies, and honor the poor, and testify to the truth, and forgive as we've been forgiven, and live according to the will of an authority outside ourselves.

- And the world thinks this is foolish, and impractical, and illogical,
-and it's simply no way to get a person ahead in the world.

And there are times when in order to live faithfully to God in this world,

- we have to actually make decisions that go against the will and ways of the world.
- Sometimes we are called to acts of civil disobedience.
- And we do so, like Shiphrah and Puah, knowing we may have to pay the consequences and suffer for it.

But we do so, like they did, because we take God into account in our lives.

- We do so because we take God's will and God's laws and God's values and God's desires seriously,
-and because we take God's power to save us seriously.
- We do so because we actually do not believe that the powers of this world have the ultimate say,
-or the ultimate power in the world.

And we do so following a crucified Jesus, and that even if the world judges us and condemns us and kills us,

- God is more powerful still.
- He will come to our aid, such that even if we die for our faith, with Jesus, yet shall we live.

Now of course, we hope and we pray, like the many mothers of Moses,

-that God will not let us die.

-We hope and we pray that He will deliver us from evil.

Like Moses' parents we pray that God will save us from the Pharaoh's of the world.

-That He will come to our aid, and rescue our baby, and do above and beyond all we could imagine, like He did with Moses.

But even if He doesn't, we trust in Him, and say with Jesus, "Not my will, but Thy will be done,"

-knowing God will somehow work all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

But in this case, Moses lived.

-And his mother and father and sister were blessed.

-And the midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, were blessed.

They all experienced the hand of God delivering them from evil.

-It was a challenging and dangerous time in which they lived,

-But in every generation it is in the midst of challenging and dangerous times that we are called to a living faith in 3D.

And sometimes that living faith is costly.

Let us pray.