

Whose Child Is This? A Launch Sunday Sermon by Rev. W. Dale Osborne

August 27, 2017

Lectionary Reading: Exodus 1:8 – 2:10

Before I delve into today's remarkable passage from Exodus, I want to share a story with you from the life of God's little church here on the Bypass. This story takes place on a Friday morning. It involves a little girl child, her immediate family and her extended family. It is a story with struggles and friendship. It is a story of love and tragedy. A story of grief and persistent commitment.

Many of you know that our church, your church called Binkley Baptist has a ministry of financial and spiritual assistance on Friday mornings. It is a ministry of hospitality and welcome made possible by your decisions as a congregation and your generous gifts to the Pastor's Emergency fund. On this particular Friday morning about a half dozen beautiful souls were gathered at the main entrance to the church when I arrived at 8:15 am. They had arrived as early as 6:00 am in order to be welcomed into the narthex at 8:30 am. Upon entering they sign in in the order that they arrived. Sometimes there are as many as 18 hopeful souls waiting when Stephenie Sanders, Duane Gilbert and I arrive. Today was a light day in number. The people who come to the church on Fridays are hard-working, proud and filled with the love of Jesus. They are children of God who need help with their utility

bill, their rent payment or perhaps their medicines. Those are the usual elements of support we provide.

On this particular Friday the first two women were elderly. They arrived together at 6:00 am. I had met them several times before so we knew one another. You see, the way our system of support is set up, a person can come back every six months if their financial need persists. For these two lovely women, living on SSI disability, their financial crisis is ongoing. They worked when they were younger but their bodies deteriorated early in their careers because manual labor can be hard on a body. One needed help with her water bill. She deals with diabetes, high blood pressure and severe arthritis. Access to water is vital to her. Your generosity meant your church could help her. Her friend who arrived with her was not seeking help for herself but for her elderly wheelchair bound neighbor who I had met about 5 years ago. Maxine needed help with her Duke Energy bill so her faithful friend showed up on her behalf. Again, I am grateful for your generosity which allowed your church to help with that bill. Both of these women were churchgoing in their time so we talked and prayed as part of our time together.

One of them asked me a hauntingly painful question before she left. "Pastor Dale", she said, "If I win the lottery do you think God would expect me to tithe even though it is gambling money?" Well,

some of you may know how I feel about the state utilizing a gambling lottery to pay its bills instead of taxing its citizens fairly as a way of governing. My children and wife know that when the lottery winning numbers appear on the local news I immediately change the television channel. I despise the lottery. So I explained my feelings about the lottery to my friend who asked the question. She responded to my feelings by saying, "Oh, Pastor Dale, I guess you don't think people should even play the lottery." We heard one another. She knew the quarry from which I had been dug. She knew the rock from which I had been hewn. That's a reference to the passage on the front of this bulletin. This church is a quarry as well.

Four more children of God passed through your church office on Friday. One who was into his 7th month of recovery from alcohol addiction needed help paying rent at his Oxford House. Two others needed assistance with a utility bill. One needed help with a security deposit in order to get into a section 8 housing unit. All of us appreciated time to talk and pray together. We nurtured one another in our faith and supported one another in simple human struggles. The last person departed and I breathed a sigh of relief and gratitude. The funds to support these incredible people had not run out and we had been blessed by time together. Now I could respond to emails and answer voicemails.

But then our business manager, Duane, told me that my most recent message was from a woman who needed help regarding a death in her family. Oh, I thought, a death call. Whoever I call back is sure to be grieving. Sure to be in need. And sure to complicate my morning. Maybe I could just not call back. Jesus rescued me from that thought and I dialed the phone.

On the other end of the phone was a voice I remembered. An elderly woman who I had connected with on your behalf about three years ago. An elderly woman with a kind, slow paced voice and a measure of faith in her heart that inspired me. “Pastor Dale”, she said, “Thank you for calling me back. I knew you would. God told me you would.” That must have been the earlier moment when Jesus convinced me to make the call when I was tempted to put it off. Mrs Jenkins then told me her story and the need she was trying to supply. Mrs Jenkins, an elderly widow was caring for her six year old great-niece. She had been doing so for several years. Ever since the child’s mother had died and the father had replanted himself in Philadelphia. It seems the father in Philadelphia had recently died a violent death at the hands of a gun wielding assailant. A funeral in Philadelphia was planned for Tuesday.

Mrs Jenkins told me, “I love this child. I have cared for her for three years when no one else could. I am not going to deny her the

opportunity to pray and feel God's support at her daddy's funeral in Philadelphia. I have to do everything in my power to get her there or I will never forgive myself. Can the church help me Pastor Dale? I need gas money to get us to Philly." I remembered meeting this little girl about three years earlier when Mrs Jenkins brought her to Binkley to seek food support. I remembered Mrs Jenkins and her faith as she told the story of their need. We determined that her round trip journey in an older vehicle would take about 800 miles. That meant a gas card of \$100.00 was needed. Thanks to your generosity, she was able to pick up the card on Friday afternoon. Thanks to the nurturing care of Mrs Jenkins, this child, who was not her biological child, would be able to sing praises to God at the Homegoing funeral of her daddy. Mrs Jenkins life has been a life of hard work, bitter toil and significant discrimination because of her race. She has faced her oppression and given herself over to God's service as she raises her great-niece. I thank God for her.

Now how in the world does this story, or any story from our common existence relate to the passage from Exodus we heard a little while ago? The story is contained in your bulletin. I encourage you to read it several times over beyond this Sunday morning. See what truths it may teach you. I will only focus on a small portion.

In the Exodus story a group of people are living in a country that was not their original home. They have been in the country for several generations but the current ruler has grown fearful of these “aliens” in his land. He fears that their numbers will grow so great that he and his people will be overpowered. Even though the aliens are forced to work extremely hard for little or no wages, they continue to thrive and grow in numbers. The ruler devises two ruthless ways to keep the number of the immigrant people down. Both measures involve infanticide of little boys. The first attempt to keep the numbers down involves the services of midwives who usually offer loving care and skilled medical support to women during childbirth. The ruler wants the midwives to murder the little boys as they are born, while the mothers are in no shape to protect their newborn sons.

Shiprah and Puah, the two remarkable named midwives manage to defy the ruler and the little boys live. The story says that because the midwives followed God’s encouragement rather than the earthly ruler’s violent commands, the immigrant’s families multiplied and their numbers continued to grow.

Does our common existence bear any resemblance to this story? I ask you to ponder that question as our incredibly blessed country does its level best to lure immigrant farm laborers into our country to do the backbreaking work of harvesting crops like tobacco,

cucumbers, kale and okra. They have come for decades to work the fields under sometimes horribly oppressive work conditions. They have come for decades also to do incredibly hard labors in other fields of industry. Now it appears their numbers are too great and we grow fearful. Send them back. Strip parents away from their children and send them back is the cry. There are far too many who are not the same skin color as us. Send them back is the fearful cry. Whose child is this, left alone to fend for itself? Whose child is this, desperately seeking a chance to learn and to eat and to live in safety? Whose six year old child is this left to be raised by her impoverished great-aunt?

Might this child be Moses, given over to the creek in a basket filled with promise? Might this child be Jesus, forced to flee into Egypt with Mary and Joseph to avoid deathly oppression? Whose child is this, walking into a church for the first time, listening for the promises of God's love and mercy. Might this child be your child? Might this child be looking to be taught and nurtured and challenged and loved at a church home like Binkley? As we launch into a new church school year, as we launch with God's guidance into new avenues of gospel service, let us be led by the teachings of Jesus. We are a quarry of God's own making. What type of rocks will be hewn from our core. We are the midwives, finding ways to speak truth to power. We are Pharaoh's daughter, helping to raise a child that may not be our own. We are the sister of baby Moses,

keeping a close eye on our sibling so that he does not suffer harm. I pray that each of us will continue to bear the joyful burden of God's generous, all-encompassing love in the church home we continue to create each day.

The Exodus Reading

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites.

The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

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, they received 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." Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. 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. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him, "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said.

Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."