



“Network of Deliverers”

Text: Exodus 1:8-2:10

a sermon by the Rev. Anna von Winckler

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

On October 10, at 7:18 a.m. I will take off from the Indianapolis airport to go to Japan to see my Navy son. When I finally get to see him in person and give him a hug, it will have been four years, three weeks, and one day, but who’s counting. A pandemic, financial constraints, and scheduling issues all led to this long time of not seeing each other. I thank God for FaceTime, which helps a bit. Despite the challenges of the last four years, I am blessed. My son is healthy and happy and I got to raise him from birth.

I have been thinking about my son a lot as I plan my trip. But this story of the challenges around Moses’ birth made me feel especially grateful for the life I’ve had with my son. This story comes at the point in history when the Hebrew people were slaves in Egypt. Their numbers were growing, making Pharaoh nervous. He needed to ensure his power and so the decree came down to have all the male babies thrown into the Nile. Imagine being a mother of a newborn, knowing that as a slave, the Ruler over you can dictate life or death; to have so little control over your own life.

But what I love about this story is that despite not having much control, the women each took control over what they could. Four slave women who defy the Pharaoh. Four women who defy the earthly powers over them as they live out their faith in God; and one woman, the Pharaoh’s daughter, who is used by God through her heartfelt compassion for an innocent

baby. Five women who defied the Pharaoh in order to save a baby that would be otherwise doomed to a senseless death all in the name of power and control.

There are several things these women teach us and the first one is faith. Shiphrah and Puah, the midwives, certainly must have had their concerns, if not been downright afraid, when they defied the Pharaoh and let the male babies live. They had their lie ready to tell when they were called in to explain why all these male babies were still alive. But they trusted God with their lives and knew that the choice they were making was in honor and glory to the God they worshipped.

Next we have Moses' mother. I can't imagine the emotions she felt as she hid her precious baby boy for those three months, knowing that she wouldn't be able to hide him forever. Finally, the decision was made that she would do what Pharaoh had commanded, but with a slight twist. She would put her son into the Nile, but her deep love for her son led her to an idea. She would build him a waterproof basket to place him in. Putting the basket among the reeds, she could only pray and trust God that her son would be saved. She trusted that God would provide for her baby and, just perhaps, one day bring her son back to her. Moses' mother was defiant in her obedience.

And then we have older sister, Miriam. Loving her mother and her baby brother, she hid and watched. I like to imagine that Miriam already had a strong faith, taught to her by her mother; trusting that somehow she might be able to do her part to help her brother.

Finally we have the Pharaoh's daughter. She knew her father's feelings about the Hebrew people, her father's slaves, and surely she knew his decree to have the Hebrew boys drowned. And yet, when she saw the baby and heard his cry, she felt compassion. She knew he must be a Hebrew child, but she too defied her father and brought him home to raise as her own.

And of course we know that Miriam then came forward to offer to find a nursemaid for the baby. Little did Moses' mother know when she placed that basket in the water that she would be reunited with him in just a short time.

Five women who defied authority. Each of these women doing relatively small things to defy a leader who had put in place a cruel decree. Defying the Pharaoh to save lives. And they did. Ultimately, they saved the life of the one God had chosen to

free the people. However, at the time these women were acting in defiance, they didn't know what the future held. They just knew they had to defy the cruelty that was being ordered. They knew they had to defend and protect life. They did just that and in those acts of defiance they were a huge part of God's salvation plan. They did what they could, acting in faith that God would provide in some way.

The second thing that these women teach us is that they take action. We need to always remember the scripture we find in James where it talks about faith and deeds and the question of whether someone can have faith without doing good deeds. James goes on to say, "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds." We are a part of God's Salvation plan. We will always be a part of the story of God's salvation work in this world. But the question is are we quietly passing along on this salvation journey or are we active in God's salvation plan? Are we playing it safe or are we actively seeking out what deeds God is calling us to do, even if that means defying the powers that be?

And that is the third thing we learn: sometimes the deeds we are called to do are deeds that need to be done in defiance to unjust actions and laws. We are so conditioned to obey the law. We pride ourselves on being law-abiding citizens. We look aghast at people who choose to lie and cheat and steal to get ahead instead of doing the hard work to get ahead.

And, yet, where would this country be without defiance? In seminary I took a course called "The Just War". It was about whether there can be a just war, looking at all the wars in the Hebrew Scriptures. Just War verses Unjust War. I have to admit that the class was more than my small brain could comprehend. But our country was founded on defiance in the name of dignity and freedom. The Boston Tea Party. Protest against tyranny. The Civil War to liberate stolen and enslaved people. And the Civil Rights protests with sit-ins and marches. Non-violent protest, but still defiance to the law, defiance to unjust laws that oppressed and put down people deemed less than.

So, you may be sitting there where am I going with this. What am I asking you to do? I suppose what I'm asking you to do is to consider how much faith you have in God. Do you trust God enough to defy authority if need be? Could you do what Moses' mother did and relinquish a loved one not knowing what might

happen to them? Would you defy authority as Pharaoh's daughter did and take in someone whose life is under threat? Could you lie to authority as the midwives did in order to help others live?

We live in an unprecedented time in our country's history as rhetoric heats up and people even talk of civil war. Whatever the future holds, we may be called upon to be brave, to stand up to authoritarian powers that seek to destroy instead of build up. And even if it never gets that bad, which I pray it doesn't, we have seen enough already of human rights being ever increasingly taken away - book bans and teaching bans and bans against our own bodies. Where will it end?

What we don't think about in this story is that while Moses was saved, there were hundreds, maybe thousands of other little boys who were killed. We need to remember all those who are oppressed who can't speak for themselves, the disenfranchised, the marginalized within our society. We need to think of them and figure out what action to take to help those in need. For that is what we are called to do. You will know my faith by my deeds.

In a couple of weeks we will be starting our book study. The other day I found online a copy of one church's goals after they had finished the study of this book. For each practice, welcome, worship, intentional faith development, mission, and generosity, they listed what were the easy and comfortable things to do. They then listed what could be done if they took some risk. Finally, they listed things they could accomplish if they trusted God enough to take some big, bold steps. That's how I would like each of you to be thinking as we go through this book. Right now you are in the safe, easy zone, which is where most churches exist, but God wants to challenge you to be bold, to be risk-takers. Be defiant, if need be, to help transform a broken society that still oppresses too many people. How can we be bold change agents? How can we be an active part of God's salvation history? We need to think creatively. To believe and then step out in faith, regardless of where that may take us. That is what God is calling each of us to do and what God is calling this church to do. God needed only five ordinary women to bring about one Moses. Our faith and our actions do make a difference. Amen.