

Lord God, who calms the troubled waters, we bless you for your presence in the midst of all our fears, all our trials, all our worries. We release to you the things we hold too tightly, and we trust your words of peace. Be among us in this hour and may we lean into your everlasting arms of love, secure that we are yours, now and always. ... May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing and of you, who are ROCK, REDEEMER, and COMFORTER of us all. Amen.

Our theme continues these next few weeks as UNRAVELING...seeking God when our plans fall apart. Each week we spend time looking at our lives in partnership with a biblical narrative where God meets us in the spiraling, unraveling our plans and our lives... and weaving us into something new.

The scripture read by Josh today is the old, old story of Moses as a baby, laid in a reed basket protected by tar, placed at the river's edge in hope to be found and saved. There's a lot to be understood about the context of this story, much of which we gloss over or we are unaware. Let's start here to see how plans for children are unraveled.

The opening verse makes it clear... Moses is born into a world of genocide. If we were to read earlier in chapter 1, we would hear how women are the heroes of this important story of God's people. In verse 1:15, Pharaoh pulls in two Hebrew midwives, Shiprah & Puah, to enlist their help in killing infant Hebrew boys at birth. However, the midwives have higher regard for God than the ruler, and are faithful to God and God's people, not Pharaoh. That's when Pharaoh orders the decree to all of Egypt, making the Egyptian people complicit in the genocide.

The baby's mother, Jochebed, has a plan for his survival... to place him in a waterproofed carrier, so that he might be found and survive. Strategically, she places the reed basket near river's edge where Pharaoh's daughter comes to bathe. The baby's older sister keeps an eye out and offers to get someone to nurse the baby for Pharaoh's daughter. In this way, Moses is raised within the context of his birth family. When Moses grows older, he is returned to Pharaoh's daughter for adoption. Moses is raised as a member of Pharaoh's household.

Let's go deeper into this narrative, as we do each week, asking: What's unraveling... what's being separated, sorted or untangled... what mystery is being revealed? How should this inform our lives?

We hear, in this synopsis, that Pharaoh's plans to kill every Hebrew boy unravel. We hear of Moses' mother's unraveled hopes and dreams for her newborn child as she releases him first, to the river, and again to Pharaoh's daughter. We hear how Pharaoh's daughter's likely inherited bias and prejudice against the Hebrew people unravels as she receives the baby into her heart and her family. The irony cannot be missed in that the very child protected and educated by the royal household will, one day, be the one to thwart the Pharaoh in the future.

At the root of this story is vulnerability... the vulnerability of an innocent baby, 'healthy & beautiful' Fun fact... did you know that 'healthy and beautiful' literally translates to 'good' as it is written in Genesis 1:31, describing the divine value God saw in everything that had been created. You could reasonably say that 'the child had a special destiny to display the goodness of God to the world.'¹

However, in an age of Pharaoh's power and his insecurity at the prolific nature of the Hebrew people, the risks taken by the Hebrew women and the Daughter of Pharaoh demonstrate great courage in the face of vulnerability.

While Pharaoh focuses on the threats of male children, God uses the women to implement strategies (Jochebed & Miriam) or to frustrate evil efforts, consciously (Shiprah & Puah) or unconsciously (Daughter of Pharaoh & her maids).

This struggle between the earthly ruler and Jochebed's determination to save God's chosen child reflects the larger biblical motif of struggle seen between the serpent and the woman and the serpent's offspring and hers (Gen 3:15)².

Pharaoh tried to destroy the Israelites, but Moses (through God's power) will destroy Egypt & rescue the Israelites.

¹ Pokrifka, H. Junia. Exodus, p 41. Wesley One Volume Commentary, edited by Collins & Wall. Nashville: Abingdon. 2020.

² Ibid, 41.

How does this this theological struggle speak into our lives? How does the unraveling of our dreams for our children lead us to recognize hope for the future?

There are many of my friends, and my own mother, who have spoken at length of their hopes and dreams for their children. Even in this season of pandemic we have heard the stories of those whose children were born into the 1917 pandemic, heard the fear of what struggle and risk the child would face. Anyone with a young child in this season can relate. Just as any parent raising a child into a season of genocide and violence against their 'people' can relate.

There are many women whose dreams for their children unraveled as they lived with life-threatening illness, injuries, and decisions leading to roads of addiction.

The actions of Pharaoh's daughter are not to be missed. In this story she is an ally of those whose lives are unraveling due to systemic oppression. In anti-oppression work, an ally is a person who uses his or her privilege to work for justice on behalf of oppressed people.

The decision to save the infant, the complete disobedience to her father's decree, and the commitment to raise the child in the household of an oppressor demonstrates a value for life for all, not just those in power.

I wonder what we might learn from this daughter of privilege. What lesson can we carry into our personal reflections and conversations and interactions with others?

I wonder about the great hope and trust Jochebed put in God as she placed the basket in the water... and the hope and trust of Miriam to approach the princess at the river's edge and speak to her?

I wonder at the sacrifice, the 'letting go', the trust and hope that these women portrayed.

A friend and colleague, Rev Dr Laura Norvell, has a mother's prayer that she posts on Facebook when she is at a moment of placing hope and trust in God for one/all of her children. I imagine that every woman in this story, and those in my life, has said a similar 'mother's prayer'.

I share this prayer with you (with Laura's permission)... may it bring you peace and lead you, in the midst of vulnerability, to release your cares and worries to God, in hope and in trust that God is a way maker. I pray this prayer unravels the instinct to clench and grasp tighter so that you may have release and peace.

Keep them safe.

Help them grow strong.

Surround them with good people. Help them find joy.³

May it be so, dear friends. Amen.

Do Prayers of people, then,

Go to Prayer of
Confession led by Liturgist

Lord's Prayer

³ Norvell, Rev Dr Laura. Permission granted for use, 18 September 2020.