

Two Mothers, One God, and a Savior

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[0 : 00] Good evening, Church of the Advent. Okay, I'm going to try that one more time. This doesn't count against my sermon time. I'm just saying good evening. Good evening, Church of the Advent.

All right, amen. It's good to be back with you again this week to open God's Word and bring a message from the book of Exodus.

As you can see, and as Pastor Dan has said, our message comes from our Old Testament reading. This evening, Exodus chapter 2, verses 1 through 10.

And the title of the sermon is Two Mothers, One God, and a Savior. Two Mothers, One God, and a Savior. And as we will see in this message, as we work our way through this text, is that God is pleased to regularly work through the ordinary to bring about His extraordinary purposes.

Would you bow your heads and pray with me as I begin? Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name belongs the glory.

[1 : 13] We thank you for this, your Word, that is not dead, but that is living, active, sharper than any double-edged sword. Lord, that pierces to the division of soul and spirit and joints and marrow and judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Lord, we are all naked and exposed to you, the one to whom we must all give account. So be pleased, Lord, through the preaching of your Word to meet us where we are and give us what we need, faith and encouragement, hope and love, correction, conviction, whatever it is, Lord God, that we would be people who live not for our praise, but for the glory and praise of Jesus Christ, our King.

Amen, amen, and amen. Well, James Weldon Johnson is probably most well-known as the man who wrote the lyrics to the song that came to be known as the Negro National Anthem, Lift Every Voice and Sing.

However, almost 95 years ago, in 1925, he and his brother, John Rosamond Johnson, published a two-volume work called The Books of the American Negro Spirituals.

They labored to compile all the Negro spirituals into this two-volume work and set them to appropriate musical arrangements. And unlike other Christian hymnals, there aren't any authors listed for any of the songs.

[2 : 52] That's because no one knows who first penned the words of any of the spirituals, but they came to be embraced by a community that was enduring suffering.

James Weldon Johnson opens the preface to the book with the words of a poem that he had written 20 years before the book was published. The title of this poem is O Black and Unknown Bards. And here's some of what he writes in that poem. Heart of what slave poured out such melody as steal away Jesus? On its strains his spirit must have nightly floated free, though still about his hands he felt chains.

Who heard great Jordan roll? Whose starwood eye saw chariots swing low? And who was he that breathed that comforting, melodic sigh?

Nobody knows the trouble I see. What merely living cloud, what captive thing could up toward God through all its darkness grope and find within its deadened heart to sing these songs of sorrow, love and faith and hope.

[4 : 03] And he ends the poem with these words. You sang far better than you knew. The songs that for your listeners hungry heart sufficed still live.

But more than this to you belongs. You sang a race from wood and stone to Christ. The words of this poem were on my mind because of this question that Johnson asks in the poem.

What captive thing could up toward God through all its darkness grope and find within its deadened heart to sing these songs of love and sorrow, faith and hope?

There is a reason why the black American slave found particular intimacy with the book of Exodus and the plight of the children of Israel in Egypt.

We have in our text what we might call the audacity of hope. We see two mothers in our text. One who is groping through the darkness of captivity with the audacity in her desperation to have hope.

[5 : 11] The other who is in the seat of privilege but whom God uses to answer that hope with the most surprising form of help. Through this help, God brings a hero.

Those are the three H's I want to talk to you about this evening. Hope, help, and the hero. And I also want to invite you to see another H in our message even though it's not one of my points.

There is a deep, deep humanity that permeates this passage of Scripture. We don't just go looking for theological facts or life application points.

I want us to come into the rich human experience of this story. God is not mentioned at all in these ten verses.

He's there but he is behind the scene putting before us the people and how he directs lives for his good purpose. And we're clued into this in the very first verse of the passage.

[6 : 22] We're told that a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi. And this is not a throwaway verse. It's significant because the Levites are going to be the tribe through whom the priests come.

It's the tribe of Levi that will have the responsibility over the holy objects in the tabernacle. The priests from the tribe of Levi will stand as intercessors.

That is, they will stand between God and the people offering sacrifices on behalf of the people and bringing them before God in prayer and worship.

They are specially set apart for God's service. And even though that hasn't happened yet in the story in Exodus, it would have been a clear indication to the original readers that they were about to see a man set apart by God for special service.

And this message, it comes in the middle of the most desperate of situations. The woman conceives in verse 2, it says, and she gives birth to a son when she saw him, that he was a fine child, the ESV translated, some other English translations, that he was beautiful.

[7 : 40] She hid him for three months. She gave birth to a son. The description that he's a fine child or a beautiful child is giving us insight into how this mother felt about her baby boy.

This is a passion-filled statement. Her love for him leads her to act in hope that things could be different for her son.

She gave birth to a son stands in direct contrast to Pharaoh's decree in chapter 1, verse 22, when Pharaoh says, every son shall be cast into the Nile.

It's not as though Moses was the only beautiful or fine or healthy Hebrew newborn baby boy.

What's emphasized here in Exodus chapter 2 is mom's love, her love for her son that drives her to hope for something better for him.

Her hope causes her to stand in opposition to the king of Egypt. She opposes the king's law, just like the midwives in chapter 1, mom is on God's side.

[9 : 04] How many of you know that it is hard to find a human love that is stronger than the love that a mother has for her child?

That motherly love, it images God's own love. In the 131st Psalm, David pictures himself at rest and peaceful as someone who's received that kind of love from God.

He says in the second verse of the 131st Psalm, but I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

He's saying that like that weaned child is content to just live in his mother's presence, he is content as a faithful worshiper with God's presence.

He compares the love and peace that he receives from God to that of a mother's love. Do you know, mothers, that in your love for your children, you are imaging God?

[10 : 17] Not only that, but look at how God works. We're going to see this again in the second point, but the Lord loves to use the ordinary truths that he has put in place, that he has wired into the fabric of our being to bring about his extraordinary purposes.

God has got a greater purpose for Moses. Moses was going to be a savior. He was going to deliver his people from bondage and even more, God had determined that Moses was going to be a

prefiguring of Jesus Christ, that when we looked at Moses, what we would be looking at is someone who is pointing us to Jesus Christ.

But Moses' mother doesn't know any of that. All she knows is that she loves her son. She doesn't care that she was a slave with no rights.

She couldn't bear the thought of giving her son up to be killed and that love, it led her to a desperate hope when she was no longer able, we are told, in verse number three, to keep him hidden.

She took a little ark. She took a basket of papyrus wreaths and made it waterproof by sealing it with bitumen and pitch and she put the child in the basket and placed it among the wreaths by the bank of the Nile River.

[11 : 43] How many Hebrew baby boys had been thrown into the Nile as it became a river of death? Here she is placing her baby at the edge of the Nile hoping to save his life, hoping that the waters of death becomes a river of life for her son.

Can you feel her heart pounding inside of her chest? I've got to do something. He may die, but what else can I do? What was she hoping and praying at that moment?

I would imagine that she had to say and pray what every mother who trusts in the Lord will have to say and pray. At some point, Lord, I place him in your hands.

Would you guard his life? I do not have control over what will happen to him, but you do. Take care of my child. Mothers, have you ever had to pray like that?

If you have not, yet you will. Her hope had to be in the Lord even as she dispatched his sister to stand at a distance to find out what would happen to him.

[13 : 13] And from the most unexpected place, God provides help in response to her hope. And I love the way the story breaks in the fifth verse. It says, Now, Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe at the river, and her young women were walking beside the river.

And wouldn't you know it, she saw the basket among the reeds, and she sent her servant woman to go and get it. Now, upon initial reading, that doesn't quite sound like help.

But when she opened it, and she seized the child, it says, and behold, the boy was crying. she took pity on him and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children.

The help for Moses, the hope of his mother's prayer, is going to come from Pharaoh's own household. The help comes from the most unexpected and least likely of places God has determined to use Pharaoh's daughter to help a Hebrew boy who would later deliver his people from bondage to Pharaoh.

Pharaoh has been trying to play God and declare himself as the one who has authority over life and death. And the clear message of the text is that no king, no leader, has absolute authority and power.

[14 : 39] Absolute power and authority belong to God and God alone. He's not mentioned in the text, but it's clear who is calling the shots. Pharaoh can't be everywhere and see everything.

He doesn't even know what's going on with Moses and his own daughter, but God does. How does God help Moses? The answer is through the same means that Moses came to be in that basket in the first place through a mother's love.

The hinge in the story are the words in verse number six, she took pity on him. This isn't her simply feeling sorry for this baby.

It is pity with a deep sense of compassion. One of the hardest words to appropriately translate into English is the Hebrew word that is translated as behold.

In verse six, it's regularly translated as behold, and sometimes it's left untranslated. It can often carry the sense of an assertion of truth with emphasis, which is why we often see behold.

[15 : 55] But to get at the reaction of Pharaoh's daughter, behold, doesn't quite cut it for me. When she opens the basket and saw the child, her reaction is like, look, look, oh my goodness, a baby boy and he's crying.

And you picture the scene, her heart, her heart was knit to this baby boy. I do not know if this is the case at the church of the Advent here in this parish, but I know that in every church that I've had the privilege of serving, either as a pastoral intern or as a pastor to this point in my ministry, we've always had some adoptive mothers, some women who have adopted children or who desire to adopt.

And what is it like, what is it like for an adoptive mother the first time that she lays eyes on the child whom God would bring into her home?

For those who desire to adopt, what would you imagine it will be like when you lay your eyes on him or her? You know that God will knit your heart to that child.

You know that there will be a deep sense of compassion and love. If you can picture yourself in that scenario, you know what happened to Pharaoh's daughter.

[17 : 32] God provided Moses with two mothers, a birth mother who out of a deep love and a desperate hope for a better life for her son was willing to let go of him and give him up.

And he provided for Moses, an adoptive mother, who the moment she laid eyes on him knew, this is my son. But you love God and how he works.

Do you understand? This is not a case of mistaken identity. Pharaoh's daughter knows that this is a Hebrew boy and he's supposed to die. He's supposed to be killed.

But she doesn't care. His ethnicity was not nearly as important to her as his humanity. It's his condition that has reached her heart.

She does not care what her father's law is. And guess what? She doesn't know what God has in store for Moses either. The Lord decided to provide Moses the protection and the covering that he needed by giving him an adoptive mother.

[18 : 47] Praise God for mothers who adopt. Look at the covering and protection that Moses receives because of Pharaoh's daughter.

His sister has been standing at a distance waiting in the wings if you will. And when she sees what happens she goes to Pharaoh's daughter and says do you want me to go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the boy for you?

Because of Pharaoh's decree there are probably any number of Hebrew birth mothers who are available to nurse a baby because their own son has been killed.

But his sister knows exactly who she's going to get. The birth mother and the adoptive mother meet. One a slave and the other royalty.

Nurse him for me she says and I will give to you your wages. Moses' birth mother gets paid to nurse her own son and help raise him.

[19 : 56] She can do it out in the open without fear because he's being adopted into the royal family. No Egyptian is going to come and kill him now.

Because of this adoption the hero is able to live. Moses is the hero. Make no mistake about it. He's the one who's going to grow up and save his people but he is a hero who needed help.

He is a hero who was vulnerable and who needed God's protection through the love of two mothers and even in this listen even in this he directs our gaze toward Jesus Christ.

For when God wanted to save us from our desperate condition of enslavement to our own sinful hearts when he wanted to save us from the path of destruction that our sinful rebellion against him has us on he sent his son born of a woman born as a baby as the Bible says for unto us a son is born a child is born unto us a son is given.

His name is Jesus Christ. The story of Exodus chapter 2 is repeated in our gospel reading from Matthew chapter 2 King Herod is threatened by the birth of the one who has been born king of the Jews and he institutes the same murderous program killing all the male children in the region of Bethlehem who were two years old or younger and the angel of the Lord warns Joseph Jesus' adoptive father in a dream and the family runs away to Egypt to escape the murderous decree.

[21 : 45] Listen, the salvation that God provides, the deliverance that God provides comes through the vulnerability of our savior Jesus Christ.

God had Moses go into the Nile into the place of his people's suffering that he might be able to identify with their sufferings but the ultimate hero is not Moses the ultimate hero is Jesus Christ.

God had Jesus enter the sufferings of his people to bring to us an even greater salvation. The deliverance that Jesus brings is greater than the deliverance Moses brought.

As the writer to the Hebrews says in Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 3, Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.

Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant to testify to the things that were to be spoken later but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son.

[23 : 06] The Savior Jesus Christ the hero who came to us as a vulnerable baby boy in need of God's protection in order to enable him to identify with us in every way.

He is a greater hero with a greater salvation than Moses because he's building a house for God. And this house is built with you and I with living stones, people that God indiscriminately brings in from every ethnic group and social class.

do you know what every member of Jesus' house has in common? Do you know other than the fact that we're people?

We all come in through adoption. We all come in through adoption, through Jesus. God bestows on us that love we see in adoptive mothers who lay their eyes upon children in need of a home and say, I'm bringing her in, I am bringing him in.

If you belong to Jesus Christ, do you know that is the kind of love that God looked at you with? faith, you are lost and going astray and God says, I take pity on you, move with a deep sense of compassion for you as you are and says, I'm bringing you in.

[24 : 50] I'm bringing you in. Do you know, do you know the adoptive love of God who has entered into our suffering? Are you able to rejoice tonight in being adopted by God?

through faith in Jesus Christ, knowing that once you're in, you're never out. Once you're in, you will never be cast out. No one is strong enough, not even you in your own fight against your sin is strong enough to take yourself out of God's adoptive love.

Amen, amen, and amen. Would you pray with me?