

Marc Steele (6)

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Preacher: Deacon Marc Steele

[0:00] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. In today's reading, we find the descendants of Jacob, still in residence within Egypt. It's been about 400 years since Joseph saved not only his family, but the strange land in which they found salvation from a severe drought.

Now, Joseph was used by God to not only help Egypt survive, he made the whole nation incredibly wealthy.

But 400 years can be a long time in the life of a nation obsessed with wealth and power. And a new pharaoh came on the scene. One who had conveniently forgotten that every single trace of prosperity Egypt possessed came from the generous hand of Joseph's God.

Egypt is a country often used to picture the world. The place ruled over by sin from which we have been rescued from. We see this repeated throughout scripture, and I've heard many sermons speaking about this issue.

[2:21] We also understand as we read the New Testament, the Apostle Paul tells us that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places.

In today's reading, Egypt sets an example for how the world system, those cosmic powers and spiritual forces of evil, act towards God's covenant children.

This pattern continues throughout history to this very day. Now, as we look at the end of chapter 1, we see that this pharaoh, this new king, oppressed the Hebrews through the wicked practice of slavery.

Now, there are some forms of slavery in scripture that we understand are different from the shameful sin that stains our own country's past. For instance, there was voluntary servitude, and the idea of a bond servant in the New Testament is a little different than how we understand slavery today.

But scripture does a pretty good job of cutting through those ethical dilemmas as we, and clearly identifies that what was going on here in Egypt was wicked and evil.

[3:50] See, since the days of Joseph, the Hebrews had stayed segregated in the region of Egypt called Goshen.

If you remember from that passage in Genesis, it was the best land because it was the land that could support agriculture. And the Egyptians actually hated shepherds.

They were scared of them. And they were more than happy to have Joseph settle down in that region. But if you look at verse 9, you will see that the Egyptians set out to deal cruelly with the Hebrews.

Assigned them taskmasters to do menial and hard labor. The end goal was to break the Israelites down, to disrupt their life, to force them to integrate into the broader Egyptian culture, to turn to the idols of Egypt instead of the God of Abraham.

Yet this did not work, and in verse 12 we see that the Egyptians' fear increases. Then the king of the Egyptians turns to one of Satan's oldest tactics.

[5:13] He kills children. Following the paramount of historical ignorance of this age, abortion advocates act as though they are standing on the shoulders of progress, something new.

There is nothing new here. Our reading today clearly shows that this is a sad, sinful, and ancient tale. All of the male babies were ordered killed at birth.

I wish this practice was limited to one place in Scripture, but throughout the Old Testament we see the practice of child sacrifice. When Jesus was born, King Herod, who echoed the same fear Pharaoh did, that a king of the Jews would rule over him.

He ordered the murder of every male child under the age of two in the area of Bethlehem. The sin of infanticide and even abortion was condemned in the earliest teachings of the Church.

The Didache, one of the greatest collection of teachings from the first century, says, and this is a direct quote, You shall not murder a child by abortion, nor kill that which is begotten.

[6:28] Today's reading we see the courageous resistance of the Egyptian midwives, which God graciously blesses.

And if Chris Fadden Fitch were here today, I would point that out to her especially. So at this point you may be asking, Mark, what kind of sermon is this?

What's the point here? To give a depressing history lesson? Bear with me for a moment. There's something for us here. In Anglican theology we have two ways of defining grace.

And I don't think that they're necessarily the best terminology today, but here they are. We call it extraordinary grace and ordinary grace. The reason I don't like it is because we've kind of changed the meaning of extraordinary.

Now we think extraordinary means better. For example, LeBron James is an extraordinary basketball player. But that's not what's really being said here.

[7:41] One kind of grace isn't better than the other. They're both amazing. Extraordinary grace are the special way God calls people to Christ.

For instance, Paul came to faith when Christ called him from a bright light on the Damascus Road. That's not the usual way people are called to Jesus.

Extraordinary grace happened when my parents were called to faith at an evangelistic conference in their early 20s. On the other hand, ordinary grace speaks to the usual way that God uses to grow our faith through the church.

Ordinary grace is present in our baptism, our confirmation, our weekly worship, the Eucharist, daily prayer.

These are all gifts of God for the people of God. And they are the way that we are supposed to be led to Christ. Ordinary here means normal.

[8:44] This is the normal way that God grows the church. Central to God's normal plan is the role of the family. God's plan for the family is one man and one woman joined together in marriage for life, raising children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord.

If things went the way they should have, Jochebed and Amram, Moses' parents, would have raised Moses alongside his siblings, Aaron and Miriam, worshiping the Lord together, side by side.

And this sheds a lot of light on the tactics of Satan in today's text. The greatness of the Hebrews lay not in their own abilities, but in their worship of the Lord.

The enemy hates the family devoted in service to the living God. The oppression by slavery and the murder of children was an attempt to destroy the Hebrew family unit, reasoning that by so doing, they would force the Hebrews to turn to the idols of Egypt.

Christian parent, know that you are offensive to the world. As you bring your family to Eucharist to hear from God's living word, sing psalms and spiritual songs of praise, you stand in the land of Goshen.

[10:24] The world will seek to oppress you and to do whatever it can to pull your family apart, to pull it away from the church, to drag it into the land of Egypt. But thankfully our success is not founded on our own works and effort.

It is God who gives and guarantees the growth of his church. When the world thinks it has destroyed God's ordinary means, God intervenes with something extraordinary.

This is why the passage we read from Hebrews at the beginning of the sermon speaks to the faith of Moses' mother, Jochebed.

She saw the beauty of the child and understood it was a life counted precious by God. And this one woman stood and defied the king of Egypt.

She could not have had any confidence in her own works because she was a single individual. The king had a nation at his disposal. So she counted on God to make a miraculous path for her precious son.

[11:36] Now as I serve in this church body and from my own personal history and experience, I believe that the greatest source of pain shared by this congregation are children who are raised away from God's ordinary means of grace.

Close to all of our hearts here are those children raised in homes of divorce or parents who have walked away from the faith. We struggle to minister God's grace to these children irregularly and imperfectly.

We simply do the best we can, despairing that the few times we have contact with them, maybe once a month, maybe just on holidays, maybe once a year, can never be a substitute for the ideal Christian home.

But I have good news for you from today's reading. God's grace is not limited by our fallen circumstances. There is nothing ideal about Moses' childhood.

Now you may wonder why we came across this scripture text today. Well, truth be told, the lectionary readings may have interfered with a potential future sermon series that Caleb and I want to do.

[13:03] So I had to find what in the comic book world is called a one-shot. That's where you have one little story between a story arc. And we had the privilege of camping last weekend.

And so about nine days ago, for an afternoon, a brief hour, I went out to try to meet my wife in the kayak and went from one point in St. Lawrence to another.

And she wasn't at the point where I thought she was going to be. So I had some time for myself. So I thought that it was time to pray a little bit and think about what we're going to preach about this week.

And there's one thing about the St. Lawrence, if you've been on the St. Lawrence in a kayak, is somehow the current kind of faces you no matter which direction you go.

So I gave up for a little while and decided it was beautiful and kind of laid down in the kayak.

[14:06] It's a two-person kayak. And enjoyed a, not a nap, but we'll call it a quiet meditation session. And we went by a point with reeds.

And as I dangled my arm off the kayak, I was reminded of, Norm told me during VBS week about the experience he had in Egypt and how you didn't let your arm dangle outside of a boat when you're on the Nile.

Why is that, Norm? Crocodiles. Crocodiles. And I had one of those not bright dad ideas for some reason. All going on in my half-awake mind is like, oh, find Corleen and we'll get Selah on the boat and we'll go back.

And dads kind of have dumb ideas. It's why we sort of, we wait a while before we express them because it will dawn on us why it's a bad idea. I'm thinking, who, what kind of, less than intelligent person would allow a baby out on a boat?

I wouldn't. There's no way you would get, and there's no way you would get my daughter on the boat right now with me and Corleen there in a light bulb.

[15:31] Jochebed puts Moses into that basket made of bulrushes, covered with a pitch, and leaves him out on the water, on the Nile, for three months.

How desperate could she have been? Three-month-old children, trust me, I know this from intimate experience right now, need to be in the arms of their mother nearly every minute of the day.

They'd need this in order to grow and develop. There's nothing ideal about his infancy. There's nothing ideal about Moses' childhood.

Certainly, the princess's rescue of the baby on the Nile was miraculous, but it did not replace the nurture of the godly home Moses was meant to be in.

There's nothing ideal about a child out on the Nile for the first three months of his life. There's nothing ideal about the arrangement to have Jochebed nurse him for only a short period of Moses' life before he is removed from the Hebrew household.

[16:56] There's nothing ideal about raising a young man in a pagan household filled with the riches of a pharaoh to tempt him to live a life of sensuality.

Think about that. Imagine putting a ten-year-old into a home where they could afford literally anything that they desired and watch how that would track with a young man through puberty into adulthood.

Think about that. But God works in broken circumstances. He calls men and women out of bad situations to be part of his church.

It is not the brokenness of one's past that defines the Christian. It is their future in Christ. The kingdom of heaven is built on God's undeserved and unearned grace presented to all.

regardless of the pain and trials of their upbringing in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many of our own leaders have been called out of broken homes.

[18:13] I don't know if I would have thought of Moses as the product of a broken home before preparing this sermon but he really is. It's not due to the sin of his parents but he was removed from the love and nurture of his family.

Our own Archbishop Fully Beach has been very public about his childhood. He was essentially abandoned by his mother. He spoke in an interview, my mother was a hippie back during those days and was eventually arrested for selling drugs and narcotics.

That's not a great start for a young man if you are a betting individual which I hope you're not but if you are you would not have given young Fully great odds to make anything of himself.

There's just something about our culture that likes to give up on kids like him. There's something about the culture of Moses Day that likes to give up on kids like Moses.

Look around you at your schools your neighborhoods your families look at the margins and edges of your society. I guarantee you you will find ignored and forgotten children there.

[19:39] But there is one who is not forgotten one who notes even when a sparrow falls to the ground. God knew about that little baby in the basket on the Nile.

God knew Moses even before he was born. God who lifted him up out of the river also placed him as a prophet and pastor of the Hebrews in order to lead them out of the land of their bondage.

And the ministry of Moses pointed all people to the ministry of another prophet like Moses only much much greater. Jesus who offered his people salvation not just from the oppression of a Pharaoh but from sin and death.

So what should our response be as we reflect on the extraordinary grace shown to Moses? Our Archbishop said it better in that same interview better than I can at least.

Speaking of his own difficult childhood he wrote it has given me a sensitivity to the brokenness in our families and the need of the church in the name of Jesus to try to minister and care for the broken people in our midst.

[20:56] Of course in the culture that brokenness exists as well. And so trying to have a heart for people in pain and bringing God's healing touch through Jesus I think that's a big part of how the situation in which I grew up shaped me.

Listen to me never ever give up on people especially children and youth no matter how broken they are or how helpless the situation they came from is you never know how or when God will use you in their lives you may be playing seeds that will not see any fruit for decades and you may be the only person announcing the good news of God's love for them in a world filled with hate and sin in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit while we remain seated let us have a moment of prayer and reflection on these words to be applied to our lives I do I do I do I do I do I do I do I do I I I I lip lip lip and lip lip lip lip if of T I I