

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY, AUGUST 23, 2020

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"Turn the Page"

Based on Exodus 2:1-10

And just like that, the world changed.

Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. (Exodus 1:8)

In the blink of an eye, the rules changed, the main characters changed, the old legacies of family and fortune and fate had to be set aside, the page was turned (as Bob Segar would say), and a new chapter was about to begin in the life of the Chosen People.

Making that shift is hard work. We have followed Jacob and his family for most of the summer now. We have been drawn up into visions, and moments of glory; we've been on the slippery trail of shady deals and family drama. We have significant emotion invested in this summer's meander through Genesis: curiosity, anger, hope (I'm still waiting for the Fairy Tale ending), and now, we turn the page to Exodus, and find we must set all that baggage down, for a new story has begun, or better stated, a new chapter in our story has begun.

Now the neat thing about new stories, is that they can become, really, anything the

people involved want the story to be. Just because Jacob's story went in a particular direction, and stirred up certain emotions, doesn't mean that we should let ourselves get ahead of the story, and jump right back into the same assumptions, because we might miss something lurking at the corner of the page. We simply don't know what this story could be filled with, because we haven't got there yet. And while you might think this sounds simplistic, I want you to hold on to the idea for a few minutes, because we Christians have a really bad habit of deciding the endings of stories before the beginning ever has a chance to really get off the ground; we decide we know the meaning of a parable without reading it again; we assume the message is always the same. So, yes, we do miss things. Let's not do that, today.

Some time had passed, and the memory of Joseph and all he had done for Egypt became dimmed in the eyes of the elite, while at the same time, the large extended family Jacob had brought with him during the famine had grown, and done very well in this foreign land. Too well. Too powerful, at least in the eyes of the Pharaoh. The Pharaoh believed that a short killing spree of baby boys would send enough shock and

fear through the Hebrew people to keep them in line. It was a horrible thing to do. Effective, but horrible. But then, not so effective in the end.

A couple from the priestly tribe of Levi welcomed a son into the world.

But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. (Exodus 2:3)

One cannot help but consider that the next scene was well planned in advance. A baby cannot be left alone for too long without attracting the attention of soldiers or crocodiles. The baby just happened to be placed close to the private bathing space of the Pharaoh's daughter. And the baby's sister just happened to be lingering close by and was able to chat freely with royalty. This all suggests to me, that the Pharaoh's daughter was known to be sympathetic to the Hebrew's dilemma, and opposed to her father's decree, that possibly, she had a repour with some of the Hebrew people. Perhaps she used her outings from the palace as a chance to give a listening ear, offer advice, and assist where she could. Perhaps she was a rebel within the palace, or even

a political activist, as we would call her today.

She (along with her cohorts in crime?) found a way to save this one child. To save even one child from death made this seemingly insignificant woman, whose name is never given: a hero. It makes one wonder what else this woman did for the Hebrew people, or how many other children she creatively saved from death. But on this day, she saved the baby who would be known as Moses.

So you might be asking yourself, "How is it that YHWH can simply drop the ball on the Jacob and Joseph story and start again with Moses?" Well, I don't think it's so much that God dropped the ball, as much as there was an opportunity to turn the page, make a clean sweep, breathe in some fresh air into the situation, and build upon what had been learned, and suffered, and experienced before. Every once in a while, as the earth spins on its axis, events, or personalities or timing, or circumstance creates a moment where great change, and great opportunity await in anticipation of willing and fearless individuals to breathe deeply and move forward in faith.

You might say that the last six months wrestling with COVID has created just such an opportunity. Yes, I said opportunity. And yes, I have spoken on this before. And yes, I am speaking on it again. You know that when something is

repeated over and over again in the Bible, it's because we are supposed to sit up, pay attention, and listen carefully. So...

We are not finished with this viral beast, and we do not know when we will be finished with it, or if we will be finished with it. The nature of this beast has changed our lives fundamentally, for a time, or perhaps forever. We have changed our activities, our worship, our communication with one another. We have lost on some fronts, and that is worrisome. We have gained knowledge and wisdom on the other. We have discovered that the world has not ended, but it has changed.

For a while, we were forced to stop our daily routines, our planned outings and our dinner parties. Worship online was suddenly the only option. Fear of getting sick dominated our thinking. Things are a little better now, and then, not so good, and then a little better, and back and forth, unstable, like a too full martini glass on unlevel ground! Open? Don't Open? Grocery Shop? Order Online? Desperate for fellowship, yet fearful of the outcome if we do. We are still so uncertain if we are doing the right things or not.

But the closures, and the adjustments have taught us that there is more than one way to do things, and the world did not stop spinning because we changed our routine. We have started to ask ourselves

important questions, that frankly, I think our God has been desperately hoping we would ask ourselves for a long time: What is really important to me right now? What makes me happy? What do I really want to do, and what was I doing for so long, just to get along?

In our private lives. In our church life. In our communities. We are beginning to think again. We are beginning to breathe deeply of the bounty of the day. We are beginning to rely again on The One who is master over all of this. What an amazing opportunity for you. For our church. For our communities. Fresh air, at last. This is an amazing gift many have not felt for a very long time. It is freeing. It is holy.

The Pharaoh's daughter knew the rules and knew the risk. She looked down upon the little baby so carefully tucked into the reed basket and knew what she had to do. She breathed deeply, and stepped out in faith, making choices that were important for what she believed in, and what she wanted in life. We are the benefactors of her choice. Take this opportunity that has been given to you. Before the Fall Season and the treadmill begins once more, choose not to jump to the end of the story, but to live the story each day, living it how you want to: living it in a way that is meaningful to you, hand in hand with your Creator. Don't be in a big rush to turn the page. Enjoy the story.

