

Women of Courage and Faith on “Mother’s Day” - Pastor Andy Wade - © 5.14.2023

Join me in my time machine and travel back in time with me. Back further than the Catholic-Protestant split in 1517. Keep traveling back past the Catholic-Orthodox split in 1054. Back before Emperor Constantine and the Council of Nicea in 325 and the crafting of creeds by powerful men. We’re going back before Jesus, before King David, before the Psalms and the Prophets. We’re going all the way back to the second book of the Bible and the story of Moses.

At the very beginning of is story are the stories of women who made his life and the liberation, the salvation of the Hebrew people possible. The tales of these women are packed with courage, wisdom, compassion, love, justice, and turning an empire on its head. These women changed the course of history.

The story of Moses doesn’t begin with Moses as the hero but as the one needing to be rescued, to be saved.

The Hebrew people arrived in Egypt years before as environmental refugees. They fled their land because there was a severe drought, and they could not survive there. They flourished in this new land ruled by Pharaoh but governed by Joseph, the youngest son of Israel, who had been sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. Joseph would later forgive his brothers saying, “What you intended to harm me, God has intended for good, to save our people from famine.

At the end of the book of Genesis, Joseph dies. At the beginning of Exodus, we’re told that the old Pharaoh was also gone and a new Pharaoh had risen to the throne, a ruler who did not know the good history between the Israelites and Egyptians. In fact, this new Pharaoh was fearful of these foreigners living in his land. The Israelites were prospering! They were growing in numbers! What if they replace us? What if they take over?!

So the empire began to treat them as second-class citizens, imposing harsh tasks and squalid conditions. But still the Israelites thrived.

Fear can save our lives when it is justified. But when fear is unfounded, it threatens to devour us and all those around us. This is the fear that ensnared the Pharaoh.

Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill all the boys but to allow the girls to live. It was an evil plan. Two of the midwives, Shiprah and Pua, refused to commit infanticide. They hid the baby boys and lied to the rulers saying, “The Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women. They are strong and vigorous and give birth before we have time to arrive!”

Civil disobedience was born with Shiprah and Pua. Courage, wisdom, compassion, love, justice, and turning an empire on its head.

Pharaoh was enraged and commanded all the Egyptian people to throw all the Hebrew baby boys into the Nile River.

When Moses was born, his mother resisted and built a small, waterproof basket and placed it in the reeds along the banks of the Nile. Moses’ older sister stood by, watching, waiting, making sure her brother was safe.

Then the Pharaoh's own daughter came down to that very spot to bathe. Seeing the basket and Moses in it, she took pity on him. Obviously, he was one of the Hebrew boys. He was destined to die in the river, but she scooped him up in her arms. Imagine that, the daughter of the Pharaoh himself blatantly disobeys her father's direct command.

Another act of civil disobedience. Another woman of courage, wisdom, compassion, love, justice, and turning an empire on its head.

Moses' sister rushed into the scene advocating for Moses and his mother; "Shall I go get a nurse from among the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" "Yes", said Pharaoh's daughter. The sister rushed back to Moses' mother and told her all that had happened, and, of course, Moses' mother was chosen to nurse the child. Not only that, Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take the child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages."

Love wins as these three women conspire with courage, wisdom, compassion, love, and justice, turning an empire on its head.

- Shiprah and Pua could have caved to the Pharaoh's commands, but instead, they crafted a plan of resistance rooted in justice and love.
- Moses' mother could have resigned herself to the murder of her child, like all the other mothers weeping for their lost sons. But she resisted and devised a plan of hope.
- Pharaoh's Daughter could have complied with her father's wishes and had the baby Moses pushed out into the river. But she didn't. She opened her arms and opened her heart, and Moses was saved.
- And Moses' sister could have taken the safe route and stayed home instead of hanging out by the river. She could have stayed away and stayed silent when Pharaoh's daughter picked up her brother, but she stood up and got in the way.

Each one of these courageous women chose love over complacency, chose action over injustice, and exercised divine wisdom over fear.

Moses would later go on to stand up to injustice against his people. Moses would go on to lead his people to freedom, to liberation from slavery, to salvation. But if it weren't for these women turning patriarchy and empire on its head, none of this would have happened.

I am confident that the Divine Spirit was with each of these women. The Holy Spirit, the *Ruach* (a feminine Hebrew term meaning wind, breath, and spirit).

- The *Ruach* of God that hovered over the waters at the beginning of Creation.
- The *Ruach* of God that was breathed into humans, giving us life.
- The Divine Spirit, also known by the feminine name, "Sophia", or Holy Wisdom
- The Divine Spirit, also understood as "The Advocate", who is on the side of truth, justice, love, life, and community.
- This Holy Spirit fills all of these women... and each one of us.

To remember that we all are made in the image of God is to remember that the Divine is also feminine. And this holy feminine is not quiet and petit and dominated by men.

- This holy feminine flows through the lives of Shipra, Pua, Moses' mother and sister, and Pharaoh's daughter.
- This holy feminine takes the lead in Mary, the mother of Jesus; in Anna the prophetess; in Jesus' companions, Mary and Joanna; and in the deacon, Phoebe, who is often stripped of her name because her position in the early church doesn't fit the patriarchal structures that later dominated the church.
- This holy feminine is found in Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother, Eunice, who passed on their faith to this leading disciple of Jesus.
- This holy feminine is in the Desert Mothers of ancient Greece and Egypt who are often overlooked as we focus on the Desert Fathers.
- This holy feminine led Saint Clair to sell her possessions, denounce her inheritance, and follow in the radical love of Jesus for the poor, founding the Order of St. Clare alongside St. Francis and his order.
- This holy feminine is found in Sojourner Truth, Mother Teresa, Coretta Scott King, Dorothy Day, Alexia Salvatierra, Lisa Sharon Harper, and so many other well-known and unknown women.

Our time machine has taken us all the way to Shipran and Puah and back again. I am grateful for the many women who have nurtured and loved me. I am thankful for the women who have made cracks in the shell of patriarchy that closed my ears and mind to the wisdom of the women around me. Without *Ruach*, without *Sophia*, the world will not survive. You embody the image of God.

The holy feminine fills these chairs and joins us online today. The world doesn't need your silence or obedience. We need your whole being unleashed in the world, your courage, wisdom, compassion, love, and justice, in big and small ways, turning patriarchy and empire on its head.

So, today I give thanks to all the women in my life, including each one of you here today. You are loved, you are appreciated, and you are essential to the flourishing of the world.

Thank you, and Amen