

Moses and the Exodus: Exodus 2:23-3:12

1. Where do I find myself in the story?
2. Where is God?
3. Where/What is the claim?

The book of Genesis ended w/a family (Joseph's) brought back together and forgiven; and yet, a tension remains. The book of Genesis ends w/the promise of land not only unfulfilled, but in danger. Even though the family of Jacob and then the family of Joseph acquire many things -- to be fruitful and multiply -- it isn't in the Promised Land -- it's in Egypt. God provided for them and worked through them, despite them, but what about the covenant made w/Abraham?

In Genesis, God kept his promises and spoke to the Israelites through dreams and even imprisonment, turning enslavement into redemption. It is that story that continues in the book of Exodus that means "going out." The story of Exodus is the story of God leading the Israelites out of Egypt, out of slavery (once again).

The book of Exodus can be divided into three parts, helpful in our understanding the Biblical story (found in *The Lutheran Study Bible*):

Chapters 1-18: God hears the Israelites cry for help in Egypt, remembers the covenant promise with the family of Abraham and leads the people out of slavery from a ruler, Pharaoh, who is only known by his title. The story of The Exodus is so important that it's even used to describe who God is: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt."

Chapters 19-24: Israel's new identity as God's covenant partner. Exodus of Egypt shows God's lasting commitment to Israel. God calls for complete loyalty -- they shall have no other Gods -- along with other teachings that will direct how they live with God and with one another.

Chapters 25-31 and 35-40: Detailed instructions for constructing moveable place of worship (tabernacle) and worshiping in the wilderness. People complete the tabernacle.

In Exodus 1 we are reminded of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt w/Jacob. Then, oppression falls upon them because “a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph (1:8).” This new ruler wonders why the Israelites are so numerous and powerful. Because he was to be the most powerful, they are forced into hard service. He even instructs the Hebrew midwives to kill the boys and let the girls live. There are two very important women in this story that God works through to continue the covenant – Shiphrah and Puah – you know they’re important b/c their names are recorded. Remember, even the name of Pharaoh is not recorded here! These women decide to not follow Pharaoh’s command and the Hebrew people continue growing in numbers.

It is around this time that a baby boy is born and his mother, of the house of Levi, fearing for her new son’s life b/c Pharaoh declared that all Hebrew boys shall be thrown into the river and killed, decides to put him in a basket and float him down the river, hoping that someone will save him. Now, this really is an interesting part of the story b/c baby Moses is put into the same river in which the Hebrew boys are killed! (This may remind you of something we discover in the New Testament – the waters of death becoming the waters of life through baptism!) Anyone that finds this child will know it’s a Hebrew boy. The child Moses is discovered by none other than the daughter of Pharaoh, who knows it is a Hebrew child, but takes pity on him and saves him. Moses’ very mother is asked to care for him while he is a baby and this Hebrew child grows up within the household of Pharaoh. Here’s an irony in this familiar story – Pharaoh lets the baby girls live, yet it is the women who are a part of setting in motion what will soon be his downfall.

The story then jumps to Moses, who is now grown, and sees the forced labor upon his people. In his anger, he kills an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew; and Moses flees to Midian to escape the wrath of Pharaoh. While there, he meets a shepherding family and marries one of the daughters, Zipporah, and they have a son. This is where our reading picks up this morning, when the king of Egypt dies and the Israelites groan and cry out – and God hears them, remembers the

covenant and notices them. A leader must be chosen to speak for the people and that leader is none other than the saved Hebrew baby in the basket – Moses.

God comes and meets Moses in the emptiness of the wilderness – notice the theme repeated in our Biblical story – God meeting people where they find themselves? God is able to work through a people who have been oppressed, through a man who has fled and seemingly begun a new life; a man who, when given the call by God says, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

And yet, we stumble upon another theme here in the midst of Moses conversing with the divine. Moses is reminded that it is not all about him; it is about God: “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you; when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.” (Notice, the sign comes after the task is completed!) Moses will only find out who he is by knowing who God is. To put it another way – the call isn’t really about who Moses is, but about who is **with** Moses – God!

Further in this story that we didn’t read today, Moses asks God to identify himself – “who should I say sent me?” he asks God. Tell them “I Am who I Am.” A lot has been written about what that means, but it seems to be that God is saying, “All that you need to know is that I am with you; who am I? Wait and see.”

And that is where we can discover ourselves in the story – knowing that the only way we know ourselves is by knowing God. Knowing that everything doesn’t revolve around us because it is about us being a part of God’s story. It’s knowing that it isn’t just who we are, but who promises to be with us. Again, God finds us where we are and invites us not only into the story of God, but into God’s identity – God’s claim is on us is that we belong to Him. Just as God had a different future for the Israelites than that of what Pharaoh was lording over them, God, too, has a different future for you – a future that promises to be greater than anything else. Who is sending us to this future and when will it take place?” we may ask. And God answers, “I will be with you. I am who I am. Wait and see.”

Helpful Resources

Narrative Lectionary website and podcast by Prof. Jacobson and Prof. Koester

The Lectionary Commentary series on The Old Testament

The Lutheran Study Bible