

“Being Brought Back Series” - Exodus

Exodus 1:1-23

- Pastor Ken Nelson

Rocker Bob Seger penned his fair share of ballads. One I remember was a song about the life of a musician. Its melancholy refrain was “*Here I am, on the road again, here I am, up on the stage, there I go, playing star again, there I go, turn the page*”. One minute you’re the object of everyone’s adoration, and favors, the next you’re bouncing down the highway on a bus, checking into a hotel in a town you can’t remember the name of. “*Turn the page*” and each day the story is different - new town, new critics, new audience. For the better, for the worse, or through the endless drone of sameness, life takes its turns, and sometimes all you can do is sigh, and say is “*here I go*”.

Seger's theme, his autobiography of wearily going from adored singer on stage to despised hippie in some all night cafe is not far from the experience revealed in the very earliest of Israel's stories. When we closed the book of Genesis, the descendants of Jacob, Israel, are comfortably situated as honored guests in the very best of the land of Egypt. Jacob's son Joseph is a national hero, even as a foreigner. He navigated the nation through a devastating period of famine and he earned adoration and won favors as a result. *Turn the page* and the story is different.

Open the book of Exodus, and you find that for the descendants of Joseph the circumstances are startlingly different. Somehow they went from honored guests to despised foreigners. We're told that a new king in Egypt meant a new audience...a tough one at that. Joseph was gone and the Pharaoh who knew Joseph's significance and star power was too. Under the timeless rubric of "*how soon they forget their history and in so doing their blessings,*" the new king casts a dim eye toward those relatives of Joseph. Fear often rises as memory fades. Pharaoh did not remember Joseph. He did not remember the blessing that flowed through Joseph. He could not therefore remember the God of Joseph.

So a contrived story about “*they being too numerous and they'll make allegiances with our enemies*” is concocted to whip Pharaoh's forgetfulness and fear into national maladies. We moderns and “Minotors” know, or ought to, that life's fortunes can change quickly. We know, or ought to, that it's far too easy to look for someone or something to blame when life “*turns a page*” and we don't like the story line. Soon what could conceivably happen, and rumors fly more numerous than geese these days, morphs in our minds into what will certainly happen, and something has to be done to stop it or at the least someone or something has to take the blame for it. Comes true then the old adage of the nice neighborhood dog that has never bitten anyone needing to be fenced or worse because someone noticed he has the teeth.

Our fears are not necessarily unreasonable. And our desire to maintain a fairly normal way of life is not inherently bad. But when our fears carelessly start to personify the threat we feel, they can become debilitating – or to put it in less therapeutic and more theological language - sinful. In this community the chapter that unfolded this summer has led us to wonder “*why did this happen*”, or who's to blame. As temperatures dwindle, our patience does too. Years of friendship and co-existence, not to mention a long legacy of God's provision could be, if we're not careful, the casualties. Suddenly this group or that personifies our frustrations or are seen as part of an alliance too influential in our lives...as in FEMA, or SBA, or our mortgage holder, or the city council or planning commission, or Xcel or the local electricians union, (my personal favorite whipping boys these days) heck even the companies who make casement windows half a country away.

Then of course there is the Corps, and perhaps most distressingly, particularly in this week of renewed friendships, are folks from Canada in general, virtually all of whom have never even heard of the Alameda or Boundary Reservoirs, much less have anything to say about them. And so at least from the Egyptian side of this story, let's learn a lesson and not turn on anyone, no matter our level of grief or anxiety. Let that apply this to ourselves as well, for far too many of us seem to think we coulda, shoulda, or oughta have done more to stave off this mess.

Above all, from the Israelite side of this story, let's remember the God who has and will always work his gracious will in the most unassuming ways. Take note please that the *really* tiny minority in this story is the most powerful, they are the means through which God was most present and through which his provision most evident - a couple of women, who our text said "*feared God*", kept their senses and held to their convictions when many around them were losing theirs. As we "*turn the pages*" in the story of Exodus, these two Hebrew midwives quickly fall from view...yet they are the ones we should remember. They, like their great-granddad Joseph, were not paralyzed nor embittered by what they suffered, and like him did not from faithful to fickle move. They are harbingers of hope, their faith announcing yet again...God is with us.

In the physics of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, every action of a forgetful, fearful leader seems to engender an even greater reaction of grace from the God who will not forget his covenants. Pharaoh's decree exposes a common human pattern of thinking and behaving. This king of Egypt is the first in a very long line of influential people and catastrophic events that has tried to detach God's people from their faith. And every one of them has failed.

Apparently it's good to be in the minority if being so means your life mirrors a certain Shiphrah and Puah and you by faith remember to bring a measure sanity to a chaotic situation. Our community is involved in a real page turner right now. But like another band of brothers who lived in a river valley long ago, our future and that of this great region does not so much hang in the balance as it is flush with promise. Turn the pages of Scripture, even and especially our story today and you'll see why. AMEN