

The Green Hill Presbyterian Church
Sunday, August 23, 2026 – Table Copy

SILENT PREPARATION

“Christ has given us many gifts, some personal to us, others more objective like the sacraments. All are given to us for the greater glory of God. Of course, we might recall St Irenaeus who said that ‘The glory of God is a human being fully alive.’ These gifts are given for our flourishing as human beings, but also to enable others. We are strengthened, we are given keys, to enable others to discover the freedom that can only be found in Christ, the Son of the living God, and through his body, the Church.”

Fr. Joseph Bailham

***CALL TO WORSHIP**

- Leader: I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise;
- People: **I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted your name and your word above everything.**
- Leader: On the day I called, you answered me; you increased my strength of soul.
- People: **All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth.**
- Leader: They shall sing of the ways of the LÖRÖD, for great is the glory of the LÖRÖD.
- People: **For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he perceives from far away.**
- Leader: Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me.
- People: **The LÖRÖD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LÖRÖD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.**

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (*Unison*)

Great God, whose wisdom is unsearchable, and whose steadfast love endures forever: We believe that you care for humble people, people who seek to follow your Word – rather than be pretentious, and proud. So come, Holy One, to transform us. Work within us – and among us – to renew our minds, and build community. Nurse us into the health you intend for all your children, and – then – make us instruments of your peace. Amen.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Most Merciful God, from whom comes every good and perfect gift, and to whom all worship rightfully belongs: Quicken our hearts this day – through the reading and hearing of Holy Scripture, that – as we hear of the wondrous ways in which you act through your people – we may both incline our hearts to please you, and align our steps to follow your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

FIRST READING:

Isaiah 51:1-6

*Our first Scripture Reading comes from the Prophet Isaiah – from Chapter 51.
This chapter is part of the third portion of Isaiah's prophecy,
and deals with – and describes – the future in the realm of God....*

Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the LORD.
Look to the rock from which you were hewn,
and to the quarry from which you were dug.
Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah, who bore you,
for he was but one when I called him,
but I blessed him and made him many.
For the LORD will comfort Zion;
he will comfort all her waste places,
and will make her wilderness like Eden,
her desert like the garden of the LORD;
joy and gladness will be found in her,
thanksgiving and the voice of song.
Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation,
for a teaching will go out from me and my justice for a light to the peoples.
I will bring near my deliverance swiftly;
my salvation has gone out, and my arms will rule the peoples;
the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope.
Lift up your eyes to the heavens and look at the earth beneath,
for the heavens will vanish like smoke,
the earth will wear out like a garment,
and those who live on it will die like gnats,
but my salvation will be forever,
and my deliverance will never be ended.

SECOND READING:

Exodus 1:1-2:10

*This morning, our Sermon Text consists of the beginning of the Book of Exodus.
The first verses of Chapter 1 have been added to the Lectionary passage –
to provide context.
In this reading, we see the often-mysterious – and counter-cultural –
ways in which God chooses to work....*

These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob,
each with his household:
Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah,
Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin,
Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher.
The total number of people born to Jacob was seventy.
Joseph was already in Egypt.

Then Joseph died, and all his brothers, and that whole generation.

But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific;
they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong,
so that the land was filled with them.

Now a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph.

He said to his people,

"Look, the Israelite people are more numerous –
and more powerful than we.

"Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and,
in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us,
and escape from the land."

Therefore they set taskmasters over them – to oppress them with forced labor.

They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh.

But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread,
so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites.

The Egyptians subjected the Israelites to hard servitude,
and made their lives bitter – with hard servitude in mortar and bricks,
and in every kind of field labor.

They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives,

one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah,

"When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women,
and see them on the birthstool,

if it is a son, kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live."

But the midwives feared God;

they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them,
but they let the boys live.

So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them,

"Why have you done this and allowed the boys to live?"

The midwives said to Pharaoh,

"Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women,
for they are vigorous –

and give birth before the midwife comes to them."

So God dealt well with the midwives,

and the people multiplied and became very strong.

And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.

Then Pharaoh commanded all his people,

"Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile,
but you shall let every daughter live."

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman.

The woman conceived and bore a son,

and – when she saw that he was a fine baby –

she hid him three months.

When she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him –
and plastered it with bitumen and pitch;
she put the child in it,
and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river.
His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.
The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river,
while her attendants walked beside the river.
She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it.
When she opened it, she saw the child.
He was crying, and she took pity on him.
"This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said.
Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter,
"Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women –
to nurse the child for you?"
Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes."
So the girl went and called the child's mother.
Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me,
and I will give you your wages."
So the woman took the child and nursed it.
When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter,
and he became her son.
She named him Moses, "because," she said,
"I drew him out of the water."

SERMON

“In Praise of ‘Invisible’ Influencers”

Imagine if the **Book of Exodus** was *being written today*.....

It would likely be a **YouTube video** – with modern casting:

Pharaoh – as the political strongman,

taskmasters – as the bureaucrats,

and **Moses** as the future leader – quietly waiting in the wings.

But the story *does not* begin with the powerful, the famous, or the visible.

Rather, it *begins on the sidelines* – with **women** –

women to whom the world is not paying a lick of attention.

No one would dream of calling *them* influencers.

There’s a reason for this, of course.

History books – whether ancient *or* modern –

tend to put kings and generals – on the front page,

presidents and prime ministers – in bold headlines,

and CEOs and influencers – in glossy profiles.

And history – then – does not pay too much attention to midwives.

So – if **Shiphrah** and **Puah** lived today –

someone might encourage them to open a *TikTok* account:

“Teach new moms how to swaddle a baby!”

“Show off your basket-weaving technique!”

“Promote the best new diaper brand!”

They might even build a small – and grateful – following.....

but nothing viral, glamorous, or trending.

In other words, *nothing that would attract attention* –

because *attention is the last thing* these midwives want.

The fact is, there is a baby — with a target on his little bottom —
and it is the self-appointed task of these women —
including a sister, a mother and — even — a princess —
to make sure little **Moses** makes it to his first birthday.

The beginning of the **Book of Exodus** — then —
reveals that **God** starts his greatest work —
not with the *powerful* — but with the *faithful*!

So, let's take a closer look at the lessons which these brave — and creative —
women teach us.

The *story opens* with the **Pharaoh's** fear.

A new **Pharaoh** has arisen "*who did not know Joseph.*"

And — because the **Israelites** are multiplying — he grows anxious.

Insecurity always seeks control —
and **Pharaoh** *tries to control* what threatens him.

So, he enslaves — and oppresses — them.
He uses policy — to enforce cruelty.

And — when oppression fails to shrink the population — he escalates to genocide.

But, notice something crucial:
God *does not* begin the story of deliverance by raising a competing king.

Nor by matching Pharaoh's power with more power.

Nor does **God** send an army, a miracle, or a prophet — at least not yet.

That comes later.

Instead, **God** begins with two midwives,
a mother hiding a newborn,
a watchful sister,
and a compassionate, soft-hearted, princess.

This – then – is the underpinning of the surprising, theological claim,
of the **Book of Exodus**:

The **story of salvation** begins in the places we overlook –
like the edges of public life,
among people who have no voice, no vote, and no visibility.

Pharaoh represents the world's assumption that *change begins with power*.

But, **Exodus** shows otherwise —
that the future of the **Israelites** is being secured by women –
women standing quietly, in the shadows.

These women remind us that **God** often works in unexpected ways.

And, like the *birth of another baby* – recorded in **Matthew** and **Luke** –
this child's life begins with the influence of marginalized – and humble –
people.

Returning to the story,
Pharaoh issues a malicious decree –
that **male Hebrew infants** must be killed.

His method — weaponizing the birthing process itself — is as cold, as it is cruel.

But he doesn't count on some ordinary people showing up to thwart his plans.

Enter the two midwives, **Shiphrah** and **Puah** –
who are powerless, with no endorsements, no legal protection,
and no friends in high places.

But they do have courage. It is not loud – or dramatic – but *it is faithful*.

Verse 17 says they "*feared God.*"

That – of course – *does not* mean that **God** terrorized them –
just that the two women had *thrown in their lot* with **Yahweh**.

Their loyalty – then is not for sale.
Their consciences – are not for rent.

Rather, their obedience belongs to **God** – not **Pharaoh** –
thus anticipating what the apostle **Peter** will say in Acts 5:29:
"We must obey God – rather than any human authority."

So – when **Pharaoh** tells them to kill the babies – they quietly refuse.

They simply do not do it!

**One simply cannot overstate the importance of the two women –
saying "no" to injustice.**

But – in time – they are summoned by "*the king of Egypt*" –
who foreshadows **King Herod** of the gospels –
and asked to explain themselves.

Here, we have to give these women credit – they are quick on their feet.

And, they feed the **Pharaoh** a cockamamie story –
about the **Hebrew women** *not* being like **Egyptian women**:

*"The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women –
for they are vigorous, and give birth before the midwife comes to them."*

And the **Pharaoh** believes them – and lets them go!

Next up is the mother – **Jochebed**. (see Exodus 6:20 and Numbers 26:59)

Her courage looks different. *She hides her baby for as long as she can.*

She tries to keep hope alive – in a world determined to extinguish it.

And – when she can hide him no longer –
she places him in a basket – carefully sealed “*with bitumen and pitch.*”

She – then – lays it – gently – among the reeds of the Nile.

This act of courage – unlike that of the midwives – is *wrapped in heartbreak.*

She can’t protect her son, but – also – she cannot just give him up.

She entrusts him to **God** in the only way she knows.

Sometimes, courage looks like *planning.*

Other times it looks like *resistance.*

To the casual observer, it might even look like *surrender.*

You could say that **Jochebed’s courage** embodies a familiar Quaker mantra:
“*Ours is not to complete the task; neither may we lay it down.*”

She surrenders, but she *does not quit* on the task.

Then, there’s **Miriam.**

Her courage is the **courage of presence.**

She cannot control the river.

She cannot stop the current.

She cannot fight off danger.

But she can *watch*. She can *stay close*.

And, she can *step forward* when *the moment* – the **kairos moment** – comes.

Courage does not always *roar* – sometimes, it simply *refuses to leave*.

The courage **Miriam** shows – there at the **Nile River** –
becomes the courage she shows *throughout her life*.

This **riverbank bravery** grows into the *leadership of a prophetess* –
who lifts the *first song of the redeemed*, upon the crossing of the **Red Sea** –
and the *collaborator* named by **God**,
alongside **Moses** and **Aaron**.

Miriam teaches us that *courage begins with faithfulness* –
like watching at the river, waiting,
and stepping forward – when the time is right.

And – not surprisingly – her life grows into a *lifetime of influence*.

Her gift isn't force, but presence.

And – sometimes --
presence is the *most powerful form of courage* **God** asks of us.

And – finally – we get to the **nameless daughter of the Pharaoh**.

She steps into the story almost by accident –
taking a stroll down to the Nile –
for what we might call an **ancient Egyptian spa day**.

She's surprised to spot a **basket** – bobbing in the **reeds**.

She opens it, sees a **crying baby** – and instantly – realizes two things:

- (1) this child is a **Hebrew**, and
- (2) her father *is not* going to like this.

But *compassion* — and maybe a little *bratitude* — win out.

So – while **Pharaoh** is busy *issuing decrees* – his daughter is busy *breaking them*.

And, she does it with the *calm confidence* of someone who is – perhaps –
influenced by **Queen Nefertiti**.

Perhaps she understands that **Nefertiti**
is not the only formidable **Egyptian woman** history will ever meet.

Fast-forward about **1,500 years** – and along comes **Cleopatra**:
queen, politician, strategist, linguistic genius, and general overachiever.

So – if **Cleopatra** represents the *dramatic*,
headline-grabbing side of **Egyptian womanhood**,
Pharaoh's daughter represents its *quiet brilliance*.

Cleopatra shapes empires; **Pharaoh's daughter** shapes a prophet –
and outmaneuvers **Pharaoh** himself –
by *bringing home* one of the very babies he wants to eliminate.

Returning to the story.....since **baby Moses** is crying,
she lifts the infant out of the basket – and comforts him.

And – with the “help” of **Moses' sister** –
Moses' birth mother is even enlisted to be his nurse!

Later – after having grown – Moses is given back to **Pharaoh's daughter**,
who then gives him his name – “*Moses*” –
because “*I drew him out of the water.*”

She then raises him – and provides for his education –
with an **unintended consequence**:

She – inadvertently –
prepares him for the day he will stand before Pharaoh's throne –
with the full force of **Yahweh** behind him!

Not bad for someone – who just went down to the river – for a bath.

Her courage reminds us that – sometimes –
God's great rescue plan begins with the person
who steps up, speaks up, or does the right thing.

And that – even against the wishes – or advice – of friends and family,
or the cultural spirit of the age.

This – then – is the underlying logic of the Book of Exodus.

Small acts of courage begin to unravel *great systems of oppression*:

The midwives don't topple Pharaoh...
the mother doesn't change the law...
the sister doesn't stage a protest...
and the princess doesn't rewrite imperial policy....

None of them hold **power**.

Yet, each one – *in her own quiet way* – resists the cruelty around her.

And – taken together – their *faithfulness becomes subversive*.

Their compassion becomes contagious.

Their **small decisions** create cracks – in the armor of the empire –
until **Pharaoh's plans** collapse under the weight of ordinary women –
women *who chose to do* what was right.

And so – by the end of **Exodus Chapter 2** – **Moses** is *alive, adopted,*
and growing up in the very palace that tried to kill him –
as well as the other **Hebrew sons of Israel**.

Here – we should note –
events once again foreshadow the *close call of another child,*
who – ironically – would be protected from certain death.

And that, by *fleeing to* **Egypt** – rather than *running away from* **Egypt**.

In yet another twist of fate, the **Pharaoh** will learn – from **Moses** –
that, unless he “*lets God’s people go,*”
the **LORD** will go out through **Egypt** with a terrifying vengeance:

But this comes later.

For now, **Moses** - who will one day confront **Pharaoh** –
is learning to walk and talk,
making himself understood – despite his stutter.

It is indeed a miracle that **Moses** makes it to manhood –
because every bit of his survival depends on the quiet courage of people –
people whose names barely appear in Scripture.

Before **Moses** is able to stretch out his hand – over the **Red Sea** –
God has already *providentially blessed him* with five women –
women who acted – without knowing –
what their faithfulness would – ultimately – make possible.

Here – then – is the heart of the story:
The future of the **kingdom of God** often rests in the hands of people
who *never see the future* they make possible.

Shiphrah and **Puah** deliver infants into the world –
without ever learning what becomes of them.

Jochebed releases her child into a basket –
with no guarantee she will ever see him again.

Miriam stands watch – long before she becomes a prophetess –
singing songs of deliverance.

Pharaoh's daughter lifts a crying baby from the river –
without the slightest idea that he will – one day –
stand before her father as Israel's liberator.

None of them knew what their actions were setting in motion.

But **God** knew, and their choices became threads –
the threads **God** used to weave the future –
a future none of them could have predicted.

Hence, they are a prime example
of what we might call a "*Theology of Little Things.*"

Or, "*The Theology of Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things.*"

Think also of the **servant girl** – slaving away in the household of **Naaman**,
the **Aramean general** inflicted with leprosy. (2 Kings 5:2-5)

Then, there's the **nameless lad** –
whose mother packed him a lunch –
of **five loaves** and **two fish**. (John 6:1-14)

And, what about **Rahab** – the **Jericho** resident, with the dubious reputation –
who quietly gave refuge to the **Hebrew spies**? (Joshua 2:1-14)

Perhaps you can think of even more examples.....

So, we return now *where we began* –
with the *world's* fascination with **influence**.

Our culture measures it in clicks, followers, platforms, and viral moments –
as though significance can be tallied by how many people notice us.

But – if we judge our lives by visibility, or recognition –
we will always feel as though we *haven't done enough*.

If – on the other hand – we measure by **faithfulness**,
by the quiet choices – made in love,
then we begin to see our lives the way **God** sees them:

That is, essential, meaningful, and woven into purposes –
purposes larger than we may be able to see – or understand.

So, our **Exodus reading** is *not simply* the preface to **Moses' story**;
it is *a declaration* about how **God** chooses to work.

God doesn't begin with kings, or armies, or institutions.

Rather, **God** begins with midwives, mothers, sisters –
and even a princess – who defies her own household's brutality.

Friends, *this* is the way **God** still works –
through **quiet courage**, and **steady kindness**,
and through people who are not powerful –
but **who show up**, anyway.

Ordinary **faithfulness** may not look like much in the moment,
but **Scripture** assures us that it is – quite often –
the way **God** changes everything.

Real influence – the kind that reshapes futures, and disrupts injustice –
most often begins with those whose names are spoken softly –
or not at all – with people whose courage is unnoticed,
but not unseen by **God**.

And today, **Jesus** calls us to be influencers –
the *salt of the earth*, and *light of the world* –
seasoning and preserving, and shedding light –
not on algorithms, trends, or markets,
but on the coming of the **kingdom of God**.

The **world** may never know our names. But **heaven** – most certainly – does.

And **heaven** will rejoice in the *quiet courage of people* – even *people just like us*.

Amen.
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AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (From the Theological Declaration of Barmen (1934))

The Christian Church is the congregation of the brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit. As the church of pardoned sinners, it has to testify in the midst of a sinful world, with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, that it is solely his property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and from his direction in the expectation of his appearance.

The church's commission, upon which its freedom is founded, consists in delivering the message of the free grace of God to all people in Christ's stead, and therefore the ministry of his own Word and work through sermon and Sacrament. Amen.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (*Unison*)

Receive our offering, gracious God, as an expression of our thankfulness. In your church, we are privileged to cultivate the dimensions of our lives that give meaning and purpose to all that we do. Here we become aware that the greatest gifts we receive are not material, and we learn how best to use the particular gifts that you give us. May many be blessed through our sharing of these offerings, and our sharing of ourselves. Amen.

CHARGE AND BENEDICTION

Friends, remember the way that God – still – chooses to work:
through quiet courage,
and steady kindness,
and through people who are not powerful, but –
who show up anyway.

Let us receive the Lord's benediction....: