

Sermon Notes March 24, 2019

Focus Moses and the Burning Bush

Lectionary Readings http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Lent/CLent3_RCL.html

Moses is a complicated figure. All you need to do is read the first three chapters of Exodus to see this. Moses grew up between two worlds, and it nearly undid him. It is a bit of a wind up to get to the burning bush, so stay with me.

Even before Moses was born, Pharaoh, the leader of Egypt, forced the Hebrews (Moses was a Hebrew) to work non-stop as slaves. The Hebrews (Israel's family) came to Egypt because of another character, Joseph, who saved his family during a famine (book of Genesis). By the time Moses arrived, hundreds of years had passed since Joseph. A new Pharaoh was in charge, and could've cared less about Joseph and the history.

Pharaoh's contempt only grew as he convinced himself that the Hebrews made too many babies and were congenitally lazy. This sounds contemporary..

Pharaoh would grow more despotic and delusional over time. Pharaoh seemed to lay awake at night thinking up new, imaginary ways the Hebrews were trying to take advantage of him.

Thank God, he did not have Twitter. As he glared over his kingdom, he demonized and belittled the Hebrew slave that he had created. In one particularly diabolical scheme, he made a new policy - drown the male Hebrew babies so that they don't pollute Egypt with their soiled genes.

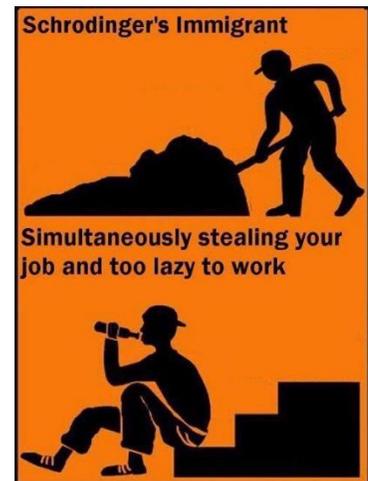
You can imagine that the Hebrew moms and dads weren't thrilled by this proposition. Many midwives quietly refused this edict and one shrewd mother came up with a plan. She would "abandon" her baby in a toy boat that would float down to the feet of Pharaoh's daughter. As a bonus, when Pharaoh's daughter saw the baby (Moses), she fell in love. Moses' mom, Jochebed, was doubly shrewd because she just 'happened' to appear when Pharaoh's daughter needed a wet-nurse (there was no formula or la leche league or even refrigeration back then). Jochebed was able to save her son, nurse him, and care for him, despite Pharaoh's demand for death.

Growing up (not to the bush yet)

This is the split Moses found himself in — a kid of adoptive Egyptian privilege, who also knew he was kind of a second class citizen - even in the palace. He would daily see his kinsmen beaten, abused, and even killed on the whims of their overseers.

Who wouldn't like to live the palatial life? At the same time, unless you have sociopathic tendencies, it would be heartbreaking to look around at the misery of the people and not be deeply conflicted that you have it so good. This misery was all Pharaoh's doing. Both Pharaohs (during young Moses and during older Moses) were really sharpening their skills as evil overlords. They give Idi Amin, Pol Pot, and Radovan Karadžić a run for their money.

Side note about Pharaoh and sociopathy - "moral insanity" is the best description I have heard to describe very overused words like socio/psychopath. We throw the word



around with little grounding in the actual meaning. We usually mean a person who is an extremely aggressive and mean. That is not necessarily sociopathy-- we are literally surrounded by sociopaths in every occupation, social class and ethnic group. Most them are not sensational killers or over-the-top aggressors. But all of them don't understand empathy or don't experience empathy (feeling someone else's pain.) I know it is a very dangerous to attempt armchair psychology on biblical figures, but I think it is a safe bet that Pharaoh was morally insane.

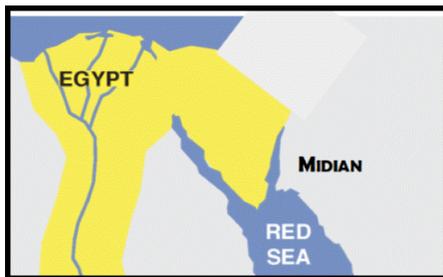
Psychopaths in fiction <https://www.remorselessfiction.com/movie-malice.html>. This website gives a vivid description of how to begin to understand the mindset of a psycho/sociopath. Nicole Kidman was preparing to play a sociopath in the movie *Malice* when a renowned therapist gave her some tips. He told her to "get in character by imagining witnessing a car accident involving a young child. She would attend the scene purely as a curious observer, and be irritated if some blood splashed on her shoe. She would also note the reaction of the mother and then go home to practice her facial expressions in the mirror."

That is moral insanity, even if that person never makes it on the evening news. **Last sidenote detour.** If you are interested, there is a short/non-sensationalized book about moral insanity, *The Sociopath Next Door*.

Back to Moses (not to the burning bush yet)

Moses (now an adult) continues to be heartbroken over his people's misery. He has an aborted attempt to help. Trying to be a do-gooder, he ends up killing an Egyptian who had hurt a Hebrew slave. Trying to cover the tracks of his passion killing, he buries the Egyptian in the sand, but is later found out by the Hebrews. After the killing, he goes back to his "do-good" ways and then intervenes in a Hebrew-on-Hebrew fight. The aggressor says to Moses in Exodus 2, "*Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?*" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "*What I did must have become known.*"

Yep, Pharaoh found out and put a mark on Moses' head. Subsequently, Moses flees to Midian and the first Pharaoh of Moses' life dies; but the next leader will prove to be worse.



Moses flees (still before the burning bush)

Moses runs east to Midian and takes up country living. He does a good deed for a Midianite priest /rancher named Reuel. They become good buds. Then, Moses marries one of the daughters, Zipporah, and has a kid named Gershom. Unfortunately, he never shakes the memory of misery he fled.

Now -- we are at the burning bush

This has been a long walk to today's scripture; however, it gives you a picture of how God was encouraging Moses to grow the spine he always wanted. With God's call, he was empowered to do something about the heartache of his people. Because of this Theophany (revelation of God's power in a burning bush), he would spend the rest of his life finding his voice, leadership, and empathy. If you read about the rest of the story about Moses, you will see that he loses his voice, leadership and empathy regularly; but, he put one foot in front of the other, did not turn back, and changed history.

Todd