

Dear Friends,

Exodus 2:1–10

It is a dangerous time for an Israelite woman to become pregnant. Pharaoh will not be held back in his desire to bring destruction. He gives the command that all Israelite baby boys must die. The midwives won't obey him, so he instructs his own people to drown the children in the River Nile.

It's a dangerous time for an Israelite woman to give birth, but they go on having them. Were Shiphrah and Puah, the midwives, there at the moment when a brave woman felt relief as one scrap of life finally emerged blinking into the world? Did this brand-new mother hope that they would say "It's a girl"? If she did hope for that, she was disappointed. The baby boy is placed in his mother's arms and the Bible says that "She saw that he was good". When God creates the heavens and the earth, God declares that what has been made is "good", the same is said of this and every child. The same is said of you. Yes, you miss the mark, go off the track, sin, but you are still made in the image and likeness of God and are a unique and essential part of God's good creation.

To begin with the mother hides the baby. She can't do that for long. So, she puts him in a basket. She goes with her daughter, Miriam to the river where the child is supposed to be drowned, but she places the basket in the reeds on the bank of the river. The word translated "basket" could also be translated "ark". It's the same word that is used for Noah's ark. The flood in Noah's time threatened the survival of all people and animals. In the ark a few were saved. This ark is carrying a child who will lead his people out of the destructive life they are now enduring and towards freedom.

The mother walks away, her heart is breaking. Miriam stands at a distance waiting to see what will happen. Of all the people to find the baby, it turns out to be the Princess, the daughter of Pharaoh. She knows what her father wants. She has heard his commands. She and her attendants look at the baby. Like the mother, she can see that the child is good. She also knows that what her father wants is not good; it is evil. She has a choice to make, a decision about which side to take, about whether to obey or defy her father, to comply with or resist Pharaoh. She knows he does not take kindly to being challenged.

The baby is crying. This is the only occasion that the word used here for crying is used for a child, usually it's the word used for the crying of an adult. This child is weeping not just for himself but for all the people. And the princess has compassion, she takes pity on the child. As the midwives could not obey Pharaoh, so she cannot obey her father.

Miriam bravely comes out of her hiding place. She approaches Pharaoh's daughter and offers to find a woman to breast feed and take care of the child. The princess knows what's happening. She knows that this young girl will take the child straight back to his mother. She knows that she's about to cross a line and join the

resistance to Pharaoh. She says "Take the child, nurse him for me and I will pay you". Not only does she allow the child to live, she gives him support to ensure that he survives.

The child grows and when the time is right, he is brought to the Princess who adopts him as her son. She calls him Moses. The Egyptian word Moses means "son of", but it's very like the Hebrew word "To draw out from water". Moses has been saved, but not for himself alone, he has been saved in order to lead others to salvation.

God creates humankind in his image, male and female he creates them. The world is made of these men and women. Today, we know how important it is that both are seen and represented in the stories we tell. I watched E.T. again recently. It's still wonderful, but it feels wrong that it's only the boys who get that big adventure on their bicycles as they try to get E.T. safely home. Today I think it would be done differently. The Bible is full of stories about men and we could wish for more about women. We've looked at men like Jacob and Esau, and Jacob's twelve sons. Now we've begun the story of another man, Moses. Moses is the most important person in the Hebrew scriptures. Perhaps we should notice how many women it takes to make sure that Moses survives and sees the light of day. This week we have seen five, the midwives, Shiphrah and Puah; Moses mother; Miriam, his sister; and Pharaoh's daughter. Later, at a well, (what did we say about wells in the Bible?) Moses meets the seven daughters of Reuel, he goes to live with them and marries one of them, Zipporah. So, could we add those seven women to the five we've already counted? That would make twelve women. Jacob's twelve sons are the foundation of the nation, but these twelve women enable Moses to become the one who brings God's word, God's teaching, God's commandments to the people. A bit fanciful of me? Maybe.

God bless you,

Tony