

“Radical Faith”

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

August 30, 2020 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

Hymns for Worship Video – August 30, 2020

“Give me oil in my lamp” #655 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1-4

(words adapted for consistency with the Book of Praise)

Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning

Give me oil in my lamp I pray

Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning

Keep me burning till the break of day

Chorus

Sing hosanna, sing hosanna

Sing hosanna to the Servant king

Sing hosanna, sing hosanna

Sing hosanna, let us sing!

Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising

Give me joy in my heart I pray

Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising

Keep me praising till the break of day

Chorus

Give me peace in my heart, keep me loving

Give me peace in my heart I pray

Give me peace in my heart, keep me loving

Keep me loving till the break of day

Chorus

Give me love in my heart, keep me serving

Give me love in my heart I pray

Give me love in my heart, keep me serving

Keep me serving till the break of day

Chorus

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“Brother, Sister, Let me Serve You” #635 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1-6

Brother let me be your servant
Let me be as Christ to you
Pray that I might have the grace to
Let you be my servant too

We are pilgrims on a journey
We are brothers on the road
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load

I will hold the Christ-light for you
In the night time of your fear
I will hold my hand out to you
Speak the peace you long to hear

I will weep when you are weeping
When you laugh I'll laugh with you
I will share your joy and sorrow
Till we've seen this journey through

When we sing to God in heaven
We shall find such harmony
Born of all we've known together
Of Christ's love and agony

Brother sister let me serve you
Let me be as Christ to you
Pray that I may have the grace to
Let you be my servant too

Richard Gillard

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“O Jesus I have promised” #569 in the Book of Praise Vs. 1, 2, 4

(words adapted for consistency with the Book of Praise)

O Jesus I have promised to serve thee to the end
Be Thou forever near me, my Saviour and my friend
I shall not fear the struggle if thou art by my side
Nor wander from the pathway if thou wilt be my guide

O let me feel thee near me, the world is ever near
I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear
My foes are ever near me, around me and within
But Jesus draw thou nearer and shield my soul from sin

O Jesus Thou hast promised to all who follow thee
 That where Thou art in glory, there shall thy servant be
 And Jesus I have promised to serve thee to the end
 O give me grace to follow, my Saviour and my friend

Arthur Henry Mann | Edward Broughton | John Ernest Bode

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Scripture Texts: Exodus 1:8-2:10

⁸ Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. ⁹ “Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. ¹⁰ Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.”

¹¹ So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites ¹³ and worked them ruthlessly. ¹⁴ They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.

¹⁵ The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, ¹⁶ “When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.” ¹⁷ The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. ¹⁸ Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, “Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?”

¹⁹ The midwives answered Pharaoh, “Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.”

²⁰ So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

²² Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: “Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.”

² Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, ² and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. ³ But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

⁵ Then Pharaoh’s daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. ⁶ She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. “This is one of the Hebrew babies,” she said.

⁷ Then his sister asked Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?”

⁸ “Yes, go,” she answered. So the girl went and got the baby’s mother. ⁹ Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.” So the woman took the baby and nursed him. ¹⁰ When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, “I drew him out of the water.”

Romans 12:9-21

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary:

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Meditation

There are some things in life I simply cannot grasp. I just don't understand how some people think as they do. In some cases, I am glad I don't understand because I don't want my mind ever to go there. How can someone abuse an animal? How does someone get to the point of committing murder? How can someone mistreat an elderly person? How can someone abuse a child?

There are some things in this world, things within the human experience, I cannot understand...

World leaders that abuse power and oppress their nation's people;

Racism and prejudice;

Economic inequality;

Neglect of the earth.

Of course, some of these things happen without us even realizing we may be doing them ourselves. We have all had unkind thoughts that were based in subconscious prejudice. We have all thrown something out instead of taking the time to recycle. Some people will refuse to give more to the vulnerable because they want to maintain their privileged lifestyle. Some will even withhold or reduce their contributions to the church because they aren't getting what they want. It happens. It's unfortunate, and we don't like to think about it, but it does happen. Artist Bob Ross used to say there are no mistakes, just happy accidents when painting. In life, mistakes are made all the time because people are people and human nature contains a certain level of selfishness and insecurity. It's not something we like to admit, but it's there.

The story of Moses' birth, and all that precedes it, is one of those biblical stories I just cannot understand. How could a king give such terrible orders? How could someone be so protective of his power, so jealous, so insecure as to order the murder of innocent newborn babies? How could he?

Then, Moses was born. His mother was wise, and had to make a heartbreaking decision to save her son. I can't imagine the grief of putting the child in the basket and letting it go in the rushes. My stomach churns just reading the story. However, her daughter was wise too. She knew what to do so that mother and child were united again, and Moses' mother knew that no matter what, he would now be safe. It still must have been terrible for her to have to give him up again, but at least this time she would release him into the care of a woman who would let him live, and let him grow up with all that he would need.

She could not have imagined what God had planned for her son. She could not have known that in her acting in wisdom, she would provide a way for her people to be freed from the bonds of slavery. But it must have been hard.

How could you, Pharaoh? How could you give such a terrible order?

How could you, God? How could you allow such a thing to happen?

It's the age-old question... if God is the God of love, why do such awful things happen to innocent people? Why indeed.

Let's not forget the midwives in this story, a group of wise women who were not afraid to do what needed to be done for the sake of saving lives. They are the front-line workers in this story. They put themselves at risk to save those babies, to save those families from devastation. Their faith in God led them to pave the way for Moses' birth and story. God worked through them, strengthened them, and blessed them for their faith.

In my son's Life Application Study Bible, some interesting points are made about these courageous, faithful women. Shiphrah and Puah are the specifically named midwives that are summoned to appear before the Pharaoh. They "may have been supervisors over the midwives... Hebrew midwives helped women give birth and cared for the baby until the mother was stronger. When Pharaoh ordered the midwives to kill the Hebrew baby boys, he was asking the wrong group of people. Midwives were committed to helping babies to be born, not to killing them. These women showed great courage and love for God by risking their lives to disobey Pharaoh's command.

Against Pharaoh's orders, the midwives spared the Hebrew babies. Their faith in God gave them the courage to take a stand for what they knew was right. In this situation, disobeying the authority was proper. God does not expect us to obey those in authority when they ask us to disobey him or his Word. The Bible is filled with examples of those who were willing to sacrifice their very lives in order to obey God or save others. Ester and Mordecai... and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego... are some of the people who took a bold stand for what was right. Whole nations can be caught up in immorality (racial hatred, slavery, prison cruelty); thus following the majority or the authority is not always right. Whenever we are ordered to disobey God's Word, we must 'obey God rather than any human authority' (Acts 5:29).

Did God bless the Hebrew midwives for lying to Pharaoh? God blessed them not because they lied, but because they saved the lives of innocent children. This doesn't mean that a lie was necessarily the best way to answer Pharaoh. The midwives were blessed, however, for not violating the higher law of God that forbids the senseless slaughter of innocent lives."¹

But why did such a terrible thing have to happen in the first place?

Why does human nature sometimes take such a dark path?

Why does God let it happen? How could you, God? How indeed.

Thankfully, God gives us strength to read a story like this and keep trusting in his mercy. No, we don't like it. No, we don't understand it. Yes, we do wish it would be one of those passages that the lectionary avoids. But there it is. Right there in front of us.

Because it's important.

It's almost as if the women knew what would be written generations later, to the church in Rome. It's as if they knew what Jesus would say in the Sermon on the Mount with regard to loving God and God's people. It's as if they knew that Jesus would say the second greatest commandment, second only to loving God, is loving neighbour, and who that neighbour would be. It's as if they knew how to model love for God by keeping God's commandments.

They obviously knew how to obey God, not the world.

¹ Life Application Study Bible: NLT. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois, 2007, Pp. 97-98.

They knew how to love genuinely by hating evil just as genuinely.

They knew how to cling to what was good, and how to honour others by placing them above themselves.

They knew how to keep their spiritual fervour by serving the Lord in obedience.

They knew how to overcome evil with good.

They just didn't phrase it that way. They probably didn't even think about it in those terms. They simply knew they loved God, honoured God's commands, and stood against evil. It sounds simple. It had a powerful impact.

Israel Kamudzandu, Associate Professor of New Testament Studies at St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, writes about the apostle's words to the Romans, "Like any other Pauline letter, Romans 12:9-21 focuses on the humanization of the gospel and the church. According to Paul, the gospel affirms all human beings and its preaching in the church must equip people to appreciate diversity in all its forms. Having cautioned Christian practitioners to be transformed and renewed in their minds, attitudes, and entire conscience, the Apostle Paul makes a clarion call around the essence of love, and summons readers of the letter to employ love as an instrument that opens the door of hospitality and faith.

"The... tone in verses 14-16 is striking; love does not get lived out in perfect environments, but is given birth, meaning, and essence in times when people are in conflict with each other. These verses encourage us to love in times of conflict, disagreements, and persecution as part of the Christian identity... The 21st-century global church is called to live and serve within [this] context..."²

As we deal with society's anxiety around the pandemic, racial injustice, social upheaval, world leadership, it is a challenge for us to share the mindset of the midwives – that of sharing and living a Godly love in the face of such challenges. They had to make a choice either to do what Pharaoh said and be in his good books, or risk his punishment by to what they knew was right. They chose the better way. It had to have been hard for them. They must have been anxious when they were asked why they weren't doing what the Pharaoh wanted.

It is hard for us to stand up against worldly authorities when what they want flies in the face of what God's Word tells us is right. It has always been difficult for God's people to stand up to false prophets and worldly power. But we must. I read an article this week in which a sports celebrity said wearing t-shirts with slogans and kneeling for the national anthem isn't enough. It just becomes a part of the routine, another conversation. It is time to do something to push for change and effect just treatment for all. It is time to be radical.

As we follow God's Word, we sometimes have to be radical. In this world, loving genuinely, hating evil and clinging to what is good can be radical.

Opening our eyes and ears and speaking for the voiceless is radical.

Shining a light on what is wrong and pointing to what is right is radical.

Being willing to take risks is radical.

² From workingpreacher.com. Resources for August 30, 2020. Commentary on Romans 12:9-21 written by Israel Kamudzandu, Associate Professor for New Testament Studies, St. Paul School of Theology, Kansas City MO.

Acting peacefully where there is conflict is radical.

Loving our neighbours – no matter who they are – is radical.

Proclaiming hope in the midst of despair is radical.

Believing and living in Jesus Christ is radical.

Friends, we are in difficult times. As events play out over the next few months in this world, we must pray for something radical to happen.

As world politics continue down their conflicted path, we must pray for something radical to happen.

As churches re-open we must pray for something radical to happen.

As we wait to see what the pandemic will do in the fall, we must pray for something radical to happen.

As teachers and students at various stages of education return to classes, we must pray for something radical to happen.

We must pray for God's power and protection and wisdom to prevail, and for the Holy Spirit to move the world to a position of justice, equitable resources and peace. And we must pray as if we believe something radical can happen, because the One to whom we pray can make anything happen. The midwives did something radical. They loved genuinely, disobeyed evil, and clung to what was good. Pray for the courage to be as radical as they were. For who knows what God will bring forth from our willingness to obey his Word in the chaos of the world. Amen.