

When Faith Overcomes Fear
Behind the Veil: Women of the Bible
Exodus 2:1-10
8-26-12
Pastor Ray Baker

There is a well known Christian author and speaker named Tony Campolo. In 2010 he wrote something that we can think of as our thought for the day:

"The power of the Spirit must be the driving force that transports you from something you ought to do, often motivated by guilt, to something you want to do because you view people differently -- you see Jesus staring back at you."

~ Tony Campolo (quoted in Alive Now! Sept/Oct 2010, p 4)

Pastor Rick and I have been preaching about "Women Behind the Veil." We learned there were four women named as Prophets in the Old Testament: Miriam, Isaiah's wife, Deborah, and Huldah. Huldah was the trusted and respected prophet, during the reign of King Josiah. When the lost book of the Law was found the King asked the priests to find someone who could help them understand this book. We know it as the book of Deuteronomy. The priests could have asked the prophet Jeremiah for advice, but they sought out the prophet Huldah and asked for her counsel to help the nation return to their faith in the God of Moses.

We talked about Ruth and Naomi's journey of loss and despair. These women had a wonderfully strong bond. They cared deeply for each other. We reflected on their efforts to find someone who would accept them into their family. We talked about the complicated relationship between Sarah, Hagar, and Abraham. Each of these women bore son's that shaped the future of two separate nations.

The book of Esther is an unusual book because it doesn't even mention God. As we read the story of Esther we learn she was a woman of simple origins who became a Queen. In her unusual circumstances she found herself in a perfect position to use her influence to save the lives of thousands of Hebrew people.

Last week we talked about Bathsheba. She is a woman who is often remembered for what happened to her, rather than for what she accomplished. She was the mother of a young boy who would become a King. She taught and raised him in a way that he grew in wisdom and in his father's favor. When King David was ready to name his successor he chose Solomon to be the new King of Judah. Solomon

rewarded his mother by making her one of his trusted advisors while he ruled the kingdom.

Today we are here to learn about five women: two midwives, Moses' mother and sister, and Pharaoh's daughter. Each of these women was willing to stand up to power and injustice....to stand up to Pharaoh himself. They didn't stand on a soap box in the middle of the town square, but they quietly defied his decree.

To understand this story we need to look at both chapters 1 & 2 of Exodus. The story begins with the news that Pharaoh is worried about the Hebrew people starting an uprising against him. He is worried the Hebrew people will have too many male children and they will eventually lead an insurrection and escape from slavery.

The Pharaoh devised a plan. He tells his task masters to work the Hebrew people even harder. Work them from sunrise to sunset. Work them so hard they will not have the energy to have more children. Even in the face of this adversity the Hebrew people continue to have bare children. In fact, they were blessed with even more children than before.

So, the Pharaoh comes up with a new plan. He calls on two of the Hebrew midwives and tells them they are to kill all the male babies that are born, but to allow the girl babies to live. The midwives hear his decree, but they know it is an evil plan and they refuse to carry out the Pharaoh's wishes.

When the Pharaoh learned the Hebrew babies were alive he called on the midwives again and demands to know why his orders were not followed. They simply told him the Hebrew women are so strong they were able to have their babies before the midwives could arrive. However, the Pharaoh didn't give up. His decree remained in place. All the male Hebrew babies were to be put to death.

Stop and think about what it was like for Moses' mother. Instead of being filled with joy after learning she was expecting, she spent wondering: Would my baby be a girl or a boy? Would my baby be safe or would he have a death sentence handed over him? I can't imagine the pressure she was under...the worry...the fear...and the anguish she surely felt.

When Moses was born his mother was able to hide him in the house for three long months. She must have worried each time he cried and with every sound he made. Would someone hear him? Would someone tell the Egyptians she had given birth

to a baby boy? What would it have been like to feel an ongoing fear for your baby's life?

This is when Moses mother devised a plan to save his life. She decided to hide the baby where it would be found and possibly be taken care of by someone who would allow him to live. It's safe to assume Moses mother knew when and where the Pharaoh's daughter would come down to the Nile River to take a bath. I imagine she would do it on a regular schedule and be seen walking to the river by the people of the city.

Moses mother and sister placed him in the basket and carried him to the river. They placed the basket where it would be hidden in the tall grass and people passing by would not see it, but the basket would still be seen by Pharaoh's daughter and her servants. Then Moses mother asked her daughter to hide nearby and watch over the baby while she returned to their home, awaiting the news of what happened.

When the Pharaoh's daughter and her servants came to the Nile, one of her servants found the basket. I imagine the servant quickly realized what was in the basket. She may have heard the baby make a noise or felt him move when she picked it up. Even the servant would have known about the Pharaoh's decree. The servant would have carried the basket to Pharaoh's daughter with some trepidation...not knowing how she would respond to the presence of a Hebrew baby.

When Pharaoh's daughter saw the baby and heard him cry her heart was moved with compassion. She said this must be the baby of a Hebrew woman. She would have known immediately what was happening...a Hebrew woman was looking for a way to save her baby's life. Maybe...just maybe someone would take him in. That someone turned out to be the Pharaoh's daughter.

This is truly an amazing story of women who overcame their fear. The Pharaoh's daughter, Moses mother and sister, and the midwives all knew of the evil plan the Pharaoh had hatched. They knew of his intent to murder the Hebrew babies...and each of them, in their own way, was willing to defy the all powerful Pharaoh. Five women from different walks of life all recognized his decree was abusive and unjust...and they decided to do something that would make a difference.

There are still examples of injustice and abuse in our world today. We can find them far away or close at hand. Even in our nation and in our communities.

One example is highlighted in a movie that is coming out this fall. It's called: "Won't Back Down." The movie is based on a true story about a woman who was raising her daughter the very best she could, while living in poverty. One of the scenes in the movie shows her little girl as she tries to sound out the word "story" for her teacher. She is able to slowly make the sound of an "s" and then a "t"...but she doesn't know how to sound out the rest of the word. When she tells the teacher she can't do it the rest of the class begins to laugh.

Another scene in the movie shows the mother opening a door at the school and finding her daughter sitting on the floor of a janitor's closet. The girl is holding her head in her hands and when she looks up you can see her face is covered in tears. Her mother takes her by the hand to pull her out of the closet and then her mother shares a few blunt words with her teacher.

This movie is about one mother who looks for other mothers who will protect their children and insist they have a better education. These women band together and stand up to the teachers, principals, and even the school board to demand a better education for their children.

Something that keeps us from standing up for what we believe in is our fear. Our fear holds us back...it stops us in our tracks. We have to learn how to face our fears to address the needs and the injustice in our world.

There is a woman named Tami Briggs who is a wonderful musician. She plays classical music on harp. One of the unusual things about Tami is she had a phobia about hospitals. She was terrified by the sights, sounds, and smells of a hospital. She absolutely refused to go inside a hospital.

Much to her dismay she received a phone call from a friend who asked her to help a woman who was dying. This woman was in a coma. She had swelling on the brain and her blood pressure was sky high. The man whom called Tami believed she would come to the hospital and play her harp this woman would respond to the music. But Tami refused to come.

Eventually Tami agreed to play, but it cost her a great deal. She tells people about how difficult it was to walk in the front door of the hospital. Her heart began to race as she stepped in the elevator. As she walked down the hall she could see, hear, and smell all the things she feared. By the time she entered the patient's room she was hyperventilating. She sat at a small table with her eyes closed and began to play her table top harp...to calm her own fears. As she touched each string she began to relax and her own heart rate and respirations slowed.

As she continued to play the patient also began to respond...ever so slowly...little by...little...to the amazement of everyone in the room...the patient's blood pressure began to drop just a little bit.

Today classes in Music Therapy are taught at many other universities. But at the time this happened it was a new concept and people didn't realize the power of music for someone who was deathly ill and even in a coma.

I hope and trust these stories about amazing women will be an inspiration to you whether you are a man or a woman. I hope the women of the bible have helped you realize that when God is by your side you can move mountains. I hope these modern day stories have helped you see there are still needs in our world and there are ways each of us can make a difference.

I believe there are needs in the world that each of us can address. I believe God has given us the ability and the strength to take on the challenges of our life. I believe God will work in us and through us to make a difference for those in need.

There is a woman named Lynn Hybels who works with women in a church setting. She leads a number of ministries to help women understand their calling to serve God in their everyday lives. One of the groups she leads is called: Dangerous Women. Listen to their creed and realize that whether you are a woman or a man God is calling you to make a difference.

Dangerous Women Creed, by Lynn Hybels

Dear God, please make us dangerous women.
May we be women who acknowledge our power to change, and grow,
and be radically alive for God.
May we be healers of wounds and righters of wrongs.

May we weep with those who weep and speak for those who cannot speak for themselves.
May we cherish children, embrace the elderly, and empower the poor.
May we pray deeply and teach wisely.
May we be strong and gentle leaders.
May we sing songs of joy and talk down fear.
May we never hesitate to let passion push us, conviction compel us, and righteous anger energize us.
May we strike fear into all that is unjust and evil in the world.
May we dismantle abusive systems and silence lies with truth.
May we shine like stars in a darkened generation.
May we overflow with goodness in the name of God and by the power of Jesus.
And in that name and by that power, may we change the world.
Dear God, please make us dangerous women. Amen.