

## **Exodus 1:8-14 [15-2:10]; 3:1-15**

This week's passage begins with a crisis of identity for the descendants of Jacob, renamed Israel, who migrated to Egypt with his family, including his son Joseph, to escape famine in the closing chapters of Genesis where we read: "a new king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done." No longer known to the Pharaoh as a favoured people, the Hebrews become enslaved to him. The crisis sets the stage for understanding the identities not only of individuals in the book of Exodus, but also of the people of Israel and of God's very self.

Once again we enter the greatest story in Judaism, the Exodus from Egypt. Immediately, there is the ever-present danger of looking under every rock, digging in the sand, and dredging the Nile for a scrap or two of some sort of historical proof of these legends. We are not reading historical facts here.

This is narrative theology, the crucial truth about a people wrapped up in a delightful and unforgettable story. And because some Hebrew author told and wrote it, it is cast in hilarity and barbed with less than subtle attacks on those who are not Hebrews - namely the Egyptians, who are nothing less than oppressors of the chosen ones, and at the same time nothing less than fools.

The tale's basic problem appears in the rising of a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph. It is more than obvious that no Egyptian, or no one who knew anything about Egypt, would write that particular sentence. Pharaoh might be called many things, even terrible things that some of his subjects probably called him - but never would he be called a king. Other nations had kings; kings were common, a dime a dozen. But there was only one son of the sun god Ra, and he was to be called Pharaoh, "great house" in the Egyptian language. So, a new pharaoh appears, and his prime characteristic is that he knew nothing of Joseph, the saviour of Egypt, as the book of Genesis made clear.

And because this so-called "new king" did not know Joseph, the previous pharaoh's right hand man, he looks at these Hebrews with very different eyes. No longer does he see the heirs of the mighty Joseph, whose shrewd policies had saved Egypt in the midst of the country's terrible famine, whose family had come to live among the Egyptians in peace and to farm in the lovely land of Goshen. Now the new pharaoh sees only one thing about these Hebrews: there are just so many of them! "He said to his people, 'Look, the people of Israel now outnumber us and are stronger than we are. We must make a plan to keep them from growing even more. If we don't, and if war breaks out, they will join our enemies and fight against us. Then they will escape from the country.'"

The pharaoh's fears are historically so absurd that any search for history here is completely ludicrous. A pharaoh fearful of a gaggle of slaves?

A pharaoh who actually thinks that those slaves are “more potent, are stronger” than the great armies of the Egyptians? Not only is the fear ridiculous, there is hidden irony in the fear. The word translated “join” is the word from which “Joseph” is derived. Pharaoh may not know Joseph, but the “increase or addition,” in short the “Josephing” of the Israelites, is precisely the origin of his fear. For Pharaoh, the Israelites are like rabbits; they are masters at multiplication. All of pharaoh’s “wise” actions that follow are driven by that fact; the chief thing about these slaves is that they just keep growing more and more numerous.

So, pharaoh tries a series of three “wise” plans to shut off their multiplication skills. First, he suggests a very long day in the brick-making and pyramid-building places, so long that the last thing on their minds when they get home is multiplication. “They appointed brutal slave drivers over them, hoping to wear them down with crushing labour.”

“But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more the Israelites multiplied and spread, and the more alarmed the Egyptians became.” It sounded like a very good plan, a most wise plan, but it did not work. So pharaoh goes back to the drawing board. If sixteen hours of making bricks does not divert their attention from multiplication, then how about twenty? “So the Egyptians worked the people of Israel without mercy. They made their lives bitter, forcing them to mix mortar and make bricks and do all the work in the fields. They were ruthless in all their demands.” The Egyptians were desperate. But, plan 2 was also a failure.

Now the “wise” pharaoh gets more personal in his wild need to stop the growth of these weird slaves. He calls two midwives, women without families of their own who help other women in the birthing process, to come to the throne room of the mighty pharaoh. “Hebrew midwives,” the grammatical construction in the Hebrew text obscures whether “Hebrew” refers to the midwives’ ethnicity or that of the women they serve. The names Shiprah and Puah mean “beautiful” and “splendid,” and so they may be generic, folkloristic designations for the women.

Shiprah and Puah appear, and gazing up at the tremendous figure, raised high above them in power, they listen to his wise command. “When you help the Hebrew women as they give birth, watch as they deliver. If the baby is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live.” The plan, if one stops and thinks for a moment, is really quite foolish! After all, who gives birth? You really ought to kill the girls, O Pharaoh.

But the midwives, we are told, “fear God” and do no killing at all, and after some time has passed the census figures for Israelites continues to rise. Pharaoh thinks his command has not been carried out and once again summons the midwives. “Why have you done this and allowed the boys to live?” Even though that is not the problem, pharaoh sticks to the foolishness of his plan. The midwives calmly reply, “The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women. They are more vigorous and have their babies so quickly that we cannot get there in time.” Not only do the midwives demean pharaoh’s own women, but they tell him a whopper of

a lie. Certainly not all Hebrew women give birth without help! But, pharaoh swallows the lie, hook, line, and sinker, and collapsing on a pile of soft rugs, he screams out a terrible command. “Throw every newborn Hebrew boy into the Nile River. But you may let the girls live.”

This pharaoh is several bricks short of a load; he is not the sharpest knife in the drawer. In short, he is a tyrant of very little intellect. Although he does get one thing right - a boy is in fact thrown into the Nile but hardly to die. Rather, that child will grow up in pharaoh’s own house, being nursed by that boy’s own mother who is paid for that motherly task by pharaoh’s own daughter! If anyone thinks that these Egyptians are ever going to get the best of these Israelites, this Hebrew author wants us to know for certain that it will never happen.

The game is over in the top half of the first inning, precisely because Israel is the chosen people of God. Pharaoh, who was thought to deal “wisely,” instead has shown himself the fool, destined to be beaten by his adopted grandson, destined to lose those rabbit-like Israelites to a wilderness, a sacred mountain, and a land of promise. But as is seen later on in the story, these Israelites will themselves all too often become too much like old pharaoh, bent less on becoming the people of God and more on worrying about those who are not like them. It is always easier to play the tyrant than it is to be God’s people. Tyrants are a dime a dozen, while people of God? Well, they are rare, it seems, all too rare.

This reading skips parts of the story and continues to provide us with the first and finest example of the prophetic commissioning scene, the form of biblical literature that, narrates God's call to the prophets. It also shows us the calling of the first and best of all the Israelite prophets, the great leader of the Exodus. Moses calls himself "an alien residing in a foreign land." But he is a man who has never really been at home anywhere.

Raised by his Hebrew mother, he was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and given an Egyptian name Moses which means "drawn from the water" or "son" in some translations. Although he tries to intervene to help his kinsfolk, the Hebrews, he ends up murdering an Egyptian and being rejected by his own. He flees Egypt and the mess he had created there, only to be identified as an Egyptian by the women he meets at the well. From the adopted son of royalty, Moses is now shepherding flocks, working for his father-in-law.

While tending his flocks in the wilderness, a burning bush attracts Moses' attention. The bush isn't consumed; it just keeps burning. Moses asks his first question: "Why isn't this bush burning up?" It is his curiosity that brings him into his first encounter with God.

This is the situation when God "comes down." When we say that God meets us where we are, the implication is that we are not always where we should be, but that God adapts and accommodates us nonetheless.

Moses is not necessarily where he should be either, but the sight of the burning bush and God's call will bring him out of obscurity and isolation - rescued yet again? And Moses is sent back to Egypt to lead the Israelite flock.

But, even for God, the task of getting Moses back on track is no simple matter. The typical commissioning scene involves the prophet's objection to God's commission. Moses tries five increasingly lame excuses as to why he of all people, should not go back to Egypt to effect the release of the Israelites from slavery. He questions himself, his God, his lack of tricks among the very trick-filled Egyptians, his supposed poor elocution, and finally, and most truthfully, he asks God to choose someone else, something he apparently has thought from the very minute the bush started talking. Here is no big-chested, grandly-haired, man of power, but a little weasel, conniving to get out of God's call.

After turning from the question of his own identity, Moses turns to the question of God's identity. Moses cheekily demands from the talking bush a name. "When they ask me, 'What is his name?' What shall I say to them?" It seems to be a very straightforward request - the name of God. But if anything may be said about God's reply, it is not at all straightforward. Moses ponders God's cryptic response, "I am who I am," an explanation of Yahweh, God's personal name. The grammatical background of this name is notoriously slippery, and subject to any number of translations, including: "I will be what I will be," "I will be who

I am,” “I am what I will be.” The deity is reserving the right to identify God’s self on God’s own terms - I can be whatever I can be.

So far from a revelation of the name from the bush, what Moses in reality gets from God is a flat refusal to reveal the divine name. Moses is to return to the Israelites in Egypt and tell them that “I am” has been revealed to him. There is finally no real content in such a “name,” and yet it may be all Moses and we can ever get. The name seems to indicate that God is known not by a name, but through God’s actions for others.

In this and every prophetic commissioning scene, God’s work is once again aligned and intertwined with human agency. Just as Moses saw the Egyptian beating a Hebrew, and Pharaoh’s daughter saw the child and heard him crying, so also has God *seen* the misery of the people and heard their cries, and has moved to action. Such seeing, knowing, and acting for others is part of the very identity of God. And much of Moses’ identity emerges from his own past, so God’s actions in the present emerge from God’s past commitments to the ancestors. The God of Exodus is one who remains faithful to the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But unlike human commitments that can waiver and fade, God’s identity will be constant. God will be known in God’s future faithfulness to Moses and the people - *I will be with you*,” God promises.

As previously stated, this passage provides us with the first and finest



example of the prophetic commissioning scene, narrating God's call to the prophets. But who is it that God calls in this story? The biblical writers focus on the call to Moses. But, it is very hard to believe that was the one and only call in this story.

Think of the women in the Exodus story: this is one of those precious parts of the Bible, that shows the intelligence of women in what was then a very patriarchal world. The women were intelligent, quick thinking, compassionate, faithful, courageous. Their power lay in these things, not in the domination as it was with Pharaoh. They were absolutely instrumental to the survival of God's people, they were catalysts to what lay ahead.

Each of these women in their own ways served as the start of something greater. They didn't stand by or contribute to the Pharaoh's terrible misuse of power, they subverted it. They recognized that their thoughts and prayers were not enough, they could actually do something. They were catalysts in God's kingdom, doing God's work in seemingly small ways, in their everyday, as the start of something greater ... and that something greater was the freeing of the Israelite people from the Egyptians under the leadership of Moses. It is not at all hard to imagine that it was God who had called these women to their tasks, who inspired and guided them just as God inspired and guided Moses.

The work of these agents counteracts the psychology of hatred and fear

that motivates Pharaoh. Their collective work is a gracious defiance because of the way it embraces life and blurs Pharaoh's attempts to draw lines of distinction between "us" and "them," between Egyptian and Hebrew, between dominating and dominated.

Moses is a model for our own unwillingness to perform the work of God, however much we claim to want to do it. And his excuses too easily match our own, our self-questioning, our refusal to act for a God we cannot fully understand, our poor skills, our limited oral abilities, and our general hope that God will go elsewhere to find a servant.

God may not call us from a bush like he called Moses - maybe God needed a more dramatic way to get Moses' attention. We may not always be aware of God's call. But when we are motivated to respond to our neighbour with love, compassion, faith, justice, when we don't divide our world into "us" and "them" and those "who are not like us," we just may be answering God's still small voice that continues to call us, like it called the five, life-changing women; the midwives, Moses' mother and sister, and the Pharaoh's daughter. God comes to us where we are, and calls us to build up this body, which seeks to tell the story and carry on the ministry of Jesus, who was called "The One for Others."

**Amen.**

**PRAYERS FOR SEPTEMBER 28, 2025**  
**16<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

This we know: the earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth: all things are connected like the blood which unites our family. Our God is the same God, whose compassion is equal for all. We did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. Let us give thanks for the web in the circle that connects us. Thanks be to Creator, the God of All!

Loving Creator, we acknowledge that our past is filled with scars inflicted upon our Indigenous siblings, who were forced to attend residential school in which they were robbed of their identity, their culture, their language. We acknowledge the harm to individuals, families, and communities that that legacy continues to have impact on through the generations. You invite us to heal this broken history by living as different people today and into our future, as we seek to learn what it means to walk together in a good way. Give us courage to confess and to own what is ours to take responsibility for so that our journey will be one of healing.

Recognizing the harm done to generations of our Indigenous siblings and neighbours, by church and state, we, your people, seek forgiveness and ask that the spirit of your Son walk alongside our Indigenous neighbours on the earth you've given us to share. Help them to see in us an expression of your love and justice.

God of justice and consolation, as Rachel wept for her children, we grieve the deaths of all our Indigenous siblings, who have been murdered over the years. We pray for families who miss their loved ones. Console all who mourn. We pray also for those who are missing and may still be found, and for all who hang on to hope in the midst of profound despair. For all those who have been wounded by senseless acts of violence, bring justice to those who cry out. Remember your beloved children as we remember you.

We pray that our Indigenous neighbours on our island, whether living on or off reservation, may be healed of their deep wounds, reclaim the gifts of their cultural heritage including their language; have access to safe drinking water, good housing, access to educational opportunities, and secure meaningful and productive employment. May the work continue to have treaty rights given them for their land, acknowledge their contributions to the stewardship of natural resources, and be given the right to self governance. Particularly we pray for our Indigenous neighbours the Esquimalt, Wasanec, and Songhees Nations.

Holy God, God of love, We pray for family and friends who are suffering: those struggling physically or emotionally, those working to overcome mental illness; those facing challenges at home or at work; those grieving the death of a loved one. Give them strength to recuperate, to find peace, and surround them with your love and compassion.

We hold in our prayers; Spirit of Life Lutheran in Vancouver - Rev. Aneeta Saroop, and North Thompson Ecumenical Shared Ministry in Barriere and Clearwater. We pray for Pope Leo XIV; newly ordained ELCIC Bishop Larry Kochendorfer, ELCA Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry, Bishop Kathy, Bishop Anna, Anglican Primate Shane Parker, Bishops of the Moravian Worldwide church, Bishop Imad Hadda and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, our sister congregation San Juan Camino d'Esperanza and Pastor Ana Maria Jara, and Holy Trinity Lutheran in Port Angeles. We pray that you bless the ministries of all deacons, pastors, lay leaders, musicians and volunteers.

Loving God, we come before you today knowing that we do not always have the words or even know how to pray when life feels heavy. Sometimes, despite knowing your existence, and your unfailing love and compassion on your people, it's hard to see your handiwork in a world that is chaotic, confused, and crumbled. Forgive us when we doubt or are blind to your unwavering presence in our lives.

This past week, we recognized International Day of Peace (September 21st), all the while living in the reality that our world often feels far from peaceful. Instead, wars, violence, and hostility remain until the days of the New Heavens and New Earth.

When we are called to the traps of colonialism, nationalism, and political allegiance, help us to remember that first and foremost our allegiance is to the King of Heaven and that we are citizens both of Heaven and of earth.

Help us to love and care for our fellow humans and creatures that we share with this world. Right now, even our natural world is groaning under the weight of oppression and opposition. And so, today we pray for areas affected by natural disasters, especially those in Southwest Asia facing Typhoon Ragasa, classified as the "King of Storms:" Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, Vietnam, Laos and the Philippines. Tens of thousands have been evacuated, resulting in chaos to life and infrastructure.

And we pray for those who deny climate changes and are indifferent to its devastating effects on our planet, including the president of the United States. May their eyes be opened to the reality and danger facing our planet, and the lives

of all living creatures.

We lift up our prayers for those who have been harmed by the church. There are many around our world, where many have experienced racism, homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny and are just finding their way back to Christ today.

We pray for women who face sexual and domestic violence around the world. Rape and sexual violence against women and girls are 'normalised' in war and almost every country. It is under-reported, under-investigated and too often perpetrators go unpunished. We pray for women who are still awaiting justice and for those who have never received justice, but continue to live with the lifelong impacts of these violent acts in violation of their bodies.

We pray for our world leaders in this season of great tension. For the current tensions in Canada, the USA, Italy and many other countries over recognizing Gaza as a State. For Ukraine and Moldova as they continue to face threats and systemic torture from Russia. And the provocation of invading airspace by Russia of its neighbours Poland, Estonia, Denmark and Latvia.

We pray for those who live in poverty, and we give thanks that Pakistan's poverty rates have reduced from 64% to 22% from 2001-2019. There are many who are still living just above the threshold and are vulnerable to economic disruptions. There are many other countries in the world including the West where homelessness and lack of affordable living is on the rise. We pray that governments step in and support basic income and human rights for all.

Jesus Christ, Holy Child of God, you have prayed for us. With your Spirit that intercedes for us, hear our prayers. Help us to commend our worries and fears to you. In you, our hope rises, and we look for the new life you alone can bring. In the name of Jesus the Christ, the risen one, we lift our prayers.

**Amen.**

**The Lord's prayer, Indigenous version follows:**

*Great Spirit, whose wigwam is in the sky and hunting ground is the earth, all are afraid of You and mighty are You called; ruler over storms, over people and birds and beasts and mountains - have Your way over all; over earth-ways and skyways; find us this day our meat and corn that we may be strong and brave, and put aside from us wicked ways as we put aside the bad of all who do us wrong; and let us not have troubles that lead into crooked paths; but keep everyone in our circle from all danger; for Yours is all that is: the earth and sky,*

*the streams, the hills and the valleys, the stars, the moon and the sun; all that lives and has breath, all that has Your life and spirit with in. Wonderful, Shining Mighty Spirit!*

**Amen**