

POP QUIZ, SHOULD KNOW 1-3. CAN ANYONE TELL ME WHO BITHIAH, JOCHEBED, MIRIAM, SHIPHRAH, AND PUAH ARE? LET ME TELL YOU THE MEANING OF EACH OF THESE NAMES-BITHIAH (PHAROAH'S DAUGHTER), DAUGHTER OF THE LORD; JOCHEBED (MOSES' MOTHER), SHE KNOWS; MIRIAM (MOSES SISTER) REBELLIOUS; SHEPHRAH (MIDWIFE) ONE WHO MAKES THE WORLD BEAUTIFUL; PUAH (MIDWIFE) GIFT OF SPEECH.

I FELL IN LOVE AGAIN THIS WEEK WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT, PARTICULARLY WITH THE RICHNESS OF THIS EXODUS STORY.

REFRESH ABOUT JOSEPH. (read Ex. 1-2) 3500 YEARS AGO, A NEW KING (PHAROAH) CHOOSES TO FORGET THE NATIONAL HISTORY OF EGYPT, AND COMES UP WITH AN ABSURDLY LUDICROUS PLAN TO STIR UP FEAR AND PREJUDICE AMONGST THE EGYPTIANS AND TO OPPRESS THE IMMIGRANT HEBREWS LIVING IN THEIR LAND FOR 400 YEARS, CREATING AN ATTITUDE OF 'THERE'S AN ENEMY WITHIN.' THE EGYPTIANS WERE ORDERED TO MAKE THE LIVES OF THE HEBREWS BITTER BY ENSLAVING THEM AND MAKING THEIR WORK HARDER AND HARDER. WHEN THAT DIDN'T SATISFY PHAROAH, HE ORDERED MIDWIVES TO KILL BOY BABIES. YES, HE ESCALATED THE HATE AND FEAR FROM ENSLAVEMENT TO ETHNIC CLEANSING.

THE MIDWIVES REFUSED TO DO SO BECAUSE THEY FEARED THE LORD, AS IN REVERED THE LORD'S WAY AND CHOSE TO FOLLOW IT RATHER THAN PHAROAH'S. IN SO DOING, SHEPHRAH MADE THE WORLD A MORE BEAUTIFUL PLACE FOR THE FAMILIES WHOSE BABIES SHE SAVED; AND PUAH USED HER GIFT OF SPEECH TO FOOL PHAROAH AT HIS OWN GAME. SHEPHRAH AND PUAH SHOULD BE REMEMBERED AS HEROINES WHO ACTED COURAGEOUSLY AND SUBVERSIVELY IN AN UNJUST SITUATION.

JOCHEBED, A HEBREW WOMAN, TOOK ONE LOOK AT HER NEWBORN SON AND KNEW THERE WAS SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT HIM SO SHE HID HIM FOR THREE MONTHS THEN PUT HIM IN A WATERPROOF BASKET AND LAID HIM IN THE REEDS OF THE NILE. HER DAUGHTER, MIRIAM, STOOD WATCH NEARBY TO WITNESS THE FATE OF HER BABY BROTHER, WHOSE CHANCE OF SURVIVING MORE THAN A DAY OR TWO ADRIFT IN THE RIVER WAS NIL. JOCHEBED SHOULD BE REMEMBERED AS A HEROINE FIGHTING DESPARATELY FOR THE LIFE OF HER CHILD.

ALONG COMES BITHIAH, PHAROAH'S DAUGHER (BUT WE KNOW SHE IS REALLY THE LORD'S DAUGHTER) AND HER MAIDS TO BATHE IN THE WATER. BITHIAH DISCOVERS THE BABY. SHE IDENTIFIES HIM AS HEBREW. SHE COULD HAVE FOLLOWED HER FATHER'S ORDER TO KILL AND JUST LEFT HIM TO THE ELEMENTS OR EVEN TIPPED HIM INTO THE WATER TO DROWN. SHE DOES NEITHER. AND MIRIAM, THE REBEL, STEPS FORWARD ASKING, "WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO GO FIND A HEBREW WOMAN TO NURSE THAT BABY FOR YOU?" 'YES' SO SHE GETS HER OWN MOTHER, WHO GETS PAID TO NURSE HER OWN BABY. HE SURVIVES UNTIL OLD ENOUGH TO BE ADOPTED BY BITHIAH AND BE RAISED AS ROYALTY IN PHAROAH'S CASTLE. BITHIAH AND MIRIAM AND THE MAIDSERVANTS SHOULD BE REMEMBERED AS HEROINES FOR BEING COURAGEOUS AND REBELLIOUS ENOUGH TO DO THE RIGHT THING. THEY ALL CHOSE TO COUNTERACT THE CULTURE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FEAR AND HATE.

DOES ANY OF THIS FEEL VAGUELY FAMILIAR TO ANYONE ELSE BESIDES ME?

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, WHICH DOES SEEM TO REPEAT ITSELF, THERE ARE ECHOES OF THESE SAME THINGS HAPPENING. THEY RING LOUD AND CLEAR TODAY HERE IN OUR COMMUNITY, ACROSS OUR NATION, AND THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. THE CLASHING AND ABUSE OF RACE AND POLITICS, RELIGION AND POLITICS, GENDER AND POWER, THE REAL AND IMAGINED WAR ON TERROR, STRUGGLES WITH IMMIGRATION POLICIES, INEQUALITY OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMY AND ITS WORK FORCE, STRUGGLES WITH MISSION AND HOSPITALITY, SUFFERING AND OPPRESSION, BONDAGE AND FREEDOM.

I SAID I FELL IN LOVE WITH THE EXODUS STORY THIS WEEK. I DID SO BECAUSE IT GIVES ME HOPE, AND STRENGTH, AND COURAGE AND THE DEEP, DEEP DESIRE TO BE A JOCHEBED, A MIRIAM, A BITHIAH, A SHEPHRAH, A PUAH. BECAUSE THE WORLD NEEDS US.

MY WORK WEEK WAS AN EMOTIONAL ONE. LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO MY MODERN DAY JOCHEBED, MIRIAM, BITHIAH, SHEPHRAH, AND PUAH.

SHE IS A WHITE, DISABLED GRANDMOTHER LIVING IN POVERTY CLINGING TO HER DIGNITY.

SHE FIERCELY WANTS TO BE INDEPENDENT AND CRIED FOR HAVING TO ASK FOR HELP.

SHE CRIED IN GUILT THAT SHE TURNED IN HER OWN DAUGHTER FOR CHILD NEGLECT BECAUSE SHE FEARS FOR THE WELLBEING OF HER GRANDCHILDREN. CAN YOU BEGIN TO IMAGINE THE PAIN IT WOULD CAUSE TO HAVE TO CHOOSE TO DO THAT?

SHE CRIES IN FRUSTRATION THAT SHE HAS A LAZY LAWYER, WHO FOR YEARS HAS IGNORED THE FACTS OF HER DIVORCE CASE AND HAS MADE A LESS THAN LACKADAISICAL EFFORT TO HELP HER.

SHE CRIES IN APPRECIATION WHEN SHE FINDS A LISTENING EAR.

OR SHE IS A LATINA SINGLE MOM WITH TWO SONS, THE YOUNGEST ONE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS WHOSE FATHER HAS ABANDONED HIM. SHE WORKS HARD. HER JOB AND HER SONS CHALLENGE HER PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY. A COUPLE OF TIMES A YEAR SHE NEEDS HELP TO MAKE ENDS MEET. SHE CRIES IN GRATITUDE THAT SOMEONE CARES ENOUGH TO HELP WITH RENT AND BUY HER CHILD'S SCHOOL SUPPLIES. SHE CRIES IN HUMILIATION THAT SHE IS FORCED TO MOVE BACK WITH FAMILY AND TRY TO GET BACK ON HER FEET FINANCIALLY. SHE MAKES JUST ENOUGH THAT SHE DOES NOT QUALIFY FOR CHILDCARE HELP. HER OLDEST SON NEEDS THERAPY TO DEAL WITH THEIR SITUATION. SHE CRIES BECAUSE SHE CANNOT SEE THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL RIGHT NOW.

OR SHE IS A BLACK WOMAN WHO MOVED TO IOWA TWO YEARS AGO FROM VIRGINIA. A SINGLE MOM WITH A DAUGHTER, PROUD TO HAVE A FULFILLING, THOUGH LOW PAYING JOB. THEY LIVE WITH FRIENDS IN ONE ROOM, SAVING FOR THE DAY WHEN THEY CAN AFFORD THEIR OWN PLACE. THE DAUGHTER STARTED SCHOOL WITH NO SUPPLIES BECAUSE THE NUMBERS SHE CALLED FOR HELP HAD BEEN DISCONNECTED AND/OR NO ONE ANSWERS. WHEN ASKED ABOUT HER FAMILY IN VIRGINIA AND HOW THEY MIGHT REACT TO THE RECENT EVENTS OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, ABOUT THE NAZISM, RACISM AND WHITE SUPREMACY, SHE GROWS CAUTIOUSLY QUIET AND SAYS, 'I MEAN, YOU CAN'T MAKE PEOPLE FEEL ANYTHING DIFFERENT. IF THEY FEEL THAT WAY, THEY'RE JUST GOING TO.' I REMARKED IT MADE ME ANGRY AND BEYOND SAD, AND THAT I THINK RACISM IS EVIL. THEN SHE SHARED ABOUT RECENTLY BEING AT A SOCIAL GATHERING IN ATALISSA AND HAVING TO BORROW A PHONE TO GET A

RIDE HOME BECAUSE HER FRIENDS WERE DRINKING TOO MUCH AND SHE WANTED TO LEAVE. THE WHITE PEOPLE POSTED ON FACEBOOK THAT A SUSPICIOUS BLACK WOMAN WAS LURKING AROUND THEIR HOUSE AND THEY THREATENED TO CALL THE POLICE. EVEN THOUGH RESIGNED TO WHAT HAS ALWAYS BEEN HER REALITY, SHE DOES NOT UNDERSTAND WHY THE COLOR OF HER SKIN MAKES HER SUSPECT. SHE IS A WARRIOR, THOUGH, DETERMINED TO BECOME SELF SUFFICIENT.

OR SHE IS A WOMAN WHOSE FIRST LANGUAGE IS NOT ENGLISH BEING FORCED TO MOVE FROM HER APARTMENT BECAUSE OF A LITTLE BUG INFESTATION THAT THE LANDLORD REFUSES TO ADDRESS AND WHO ALSO REFUSES TO GIVE HER BACK HER DEPOSIT BECAUSE HE SAYS HE DOESN'T HAVE TO IF HE DOESN'T WANT TO. SHE IS POWERLESS TO FIGHT THE UNFAIRNESS AND SO WILL BE STARTING OVER WITH NEXT TO NO RESOURCES.

ALL THESE MOTHERS TRYING TO SAVE THEIR BABIES AND THEMSELVES.
THEY NEEDED MY HELP. A WHITE, MIDDLE CLASS WOMAN IN A POSITION TO DO SO.
AND I CRIED WHILE WRITING THIS. IN GRATITUDE, IN COMPASSION, IN FRUSTRATION, IN SADNESS AND EVEN ANGER. BUT I FELL IN LOVE. WITH ALL THE WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN AND CONTINUE TO BE UNSUNG HEROINES FOR THE SAKE OF THEIR AND OTHER WOMEN'S BABIES.
FOR THE TEACHERS, SOCIAL WORKERS, LIBRARIANS, COACHES, NEIGHBORS, PASTORS, CEO'S, CHILDCARE PROVIDERS, LAWYERS, DOCTORS, GRANDMAS WHO DO SMALL OR LARGE ACTS OF FAITHFUL SUBVERSIVE RESISTANCE TO A WORLD GONE AWRY.

AND MOSTLY I FELL IN LOVE WITH CHRIST JESUS AGAIN.
BECAUSE I INTENDED TO PREACH THE GOSPEL AS FOUND IN MATTHEW.
I INTENDED TO PREACH ABOUT JESUS' QUESTION 'WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?'
THE MORE ACCURATE TRANSLATION IS 'WHO ARE YOU SAYING I AM?'
AND BECAUSE I THINK WHAT HE REALLY MEANT WAS 'WHO ARE YOU SAYING I AM BY THE WAY YOU ACT AND THE THINGS YOU ARE DOING?'
AND SO, I BEGAN AT THE START OF THE WEEK ASKING MYSELF THAT REPEATEDLY.
WHO AM I SAYING I AM?

I HAVE CONFESSED CHRIST AS MY SAVIOR.
I HAVE BEEN BAPTISED AND ACCEPTED THE VOW TO RENOUNCE EVIL.
THIS WEEK, I BELIEVE THAT MEANT TO BE FAITHFUL IN WHATEVER SMALL WAYS I COULD TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE FOR SOMEONE.
WHEN I ASK MYSELF WHO I AM AS A CHRISTIAN I HAVE TO DECIDE WHO JESUS IS.
IF I TAKE THE NAME OF CHRISTIAN, MY TIME, ENERGY, BANK ACCOUNT, RELATIONSHIPS HAVE TO TRY TO REFLECT THAT.
SAME FOR YOU. WHO DO YOU SAY JESUS IS? HOW DO YOU SAY WHO JESUS IS? WHO ARE YOU?
I ASK NOT TO LAY A GUILT TRIP BUT TO INVITE YOU TO EXAMINE WHAT YOU MEAN WHEN YOU SAY IT.
THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION FOR ME WAS 'WHO AM I WILLING TO BE?'

I WANT TO BECOME A BITHIAH, A TRUE DAUGHTER OF THE LORD; A JOCHEBED, SEEING THE GOODNESS AND PRECIOUSNESS OF EVERY CHILD; A MIRIAM, TRULY REBELLIOUS AGAINST EVIL AND WILLING TO TAKE SUBVERSIVE ACTS TO DO SO; A SHEPHRAH MAKING THE WORLD A MORE BEAUTIFUL PLACE; A PUAH, QUICK- WITTED AND BOLD ENOUGH TO STAND UP AND SPEAK AGAINST ANY SOCIAL OR CULTURAL SYSTEM OR TYRANT OR IDEOLOGY THAT IS NOT JUST. THAT'S WHAT I WANT TO BE WHEN I AM A GROWN UP CHRISTIAN.

A SHARER OF CHRISTLIKE THINGS, RELEASING DIVINE HEALING ENERGY.

THIS IS WHAT I WOULD SAY IT MEANS TO MOVE ONWARD AS CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS. WE ARE IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE WHETHER WE REALIZE IT OR NOT. WHAT WE DO CAN CHANGE THE WORLD FOR GOOD RATHER THAN FOR EVIL. INACTION IS NOT THE ANSWER. REMAINING QUIET IN THE FACE OF EVIL IS NOT THE ANSWER. ENGAGING IN A LIFELONG STUDY OF, AND CONVERSATION AND ENCOUNTERS WITH, JESUS AND A SHARING OF THESE AMONG US, MIGHT BE THE FIRST STEP OF THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD. TAKE THAT STEP. THEN CONTINUE ON. AS ONE OF OUR OLD HYMNS SAYS: TAKE THE NAME OF JESUS WITH YOU. HE IS THE HOPE OF EARTH AND JOY OF HEAVEN. AND WE ARE HIS. THROUGH HIM, WE ARE ALL GOD'S PRECIOUS BABIES. YOUR IMMIGRANT NEIGHBORS ARE GOD'S BABIES. REFUGEES AROUND THE WORLD ARE GOD'S BABIES. MAY YOU KNOW IT. MAY YOU FEEL IT. MAY YOU TELL IT. MAY YOU LIVE IT. AMEN.

A PRAYER FOR THE SAINTS - When the risk and vulnerability for our brothers and sisters is very real, O God, and where life could be denied and the cause of justice fail, give us the faith, not to wait upon clear instructions, but to act upon deep imperatives that your will may be done and your rule begin. Amen.