

Hebrews 11:1-2,23 Heroes of Faith: The Parents of Moses

“It’s a boy!” Typically, parents are thrilled when they hear those words. Maybe they’re the words spoken by the ultrasound technician during a pregnancy checkup, or perhaps by the doctor as she delivers that newborn baby boy and lays him in mom’s arms for the first time. Typically a gender reveal is a joyous occasion.

But the joy of finding out they had brought a baby boy into this world would have been seriously muted for Israelite parents living in Egypt about 3500 years ago. Last week’s Heroes of Faith story recalled how the people of Israel had come to live in the land of Egypt. Pastor Olson reminded us that God had worked for the good of his people by raising up Joseph as a great leader in Egypt during a time of widespread famine. We heard how many lives were saved as God used Joseph, and how Joseph’s father Jacob and his brothers came to live in Egypt after Joseph’s identity became known to them. And those sons of Jacob, the people of Israel, prospered in that land of Egypt. We heard in our Old Testament lesson today that the Israelites were very fruitful and multiplied in the land of Egypt. In fact, they prospered to such an extent that, when a new Pharaoh arose in Egypt who did not know about Joseph and did not care about what good he had done for his Egyptian ancestors, he was so threatened by the Israelites that he forced the Israelites into hard slave labor to try to subdue them.

But that didn’t work. God kept blessing the Israelites. He kept blessing them with children. Lots of them. The Israelites multiplied while they were in Egypt. God’s blessings of children were so great among the people of Israel that the Pharaoh of Egypt made a horrifyingly cruel and draconian edict: all the male children born of the Israelites were to be thrown into the Nile River. Government sanctioned infanticide. Murder mandated by the state. So, we can only imagine how the typically joyous occasion of the birth of a child was transformed into an occasion for fear and anguish when an Israelite couple heard a Hebrew midwife deliver a baby and say, *“It’s a boy.”* No doubt, that’s what Moses’ parents felt when he was born and they discovered that they had given birth to a child whose murder had been ordered by the king.

What were the parents of this child going to do? If they disobeyed the Pharaoh’s command and if what they had done was discovered, they certainly would have faced Pharaoh’s wrath. No doubt, they would have paid with their lives. The risk would have been enormous.

But I doubt that doubts ever arose in the minds of Moses’ parents about what they were going to do when they discovered that their newborn was a baby boy. The words of the writer to the Hebrews surely seem to support that, don’t they? Listen again: **“²³ By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months after he was born...They were not afraid of the king’s edict.** Moses’ parents were not going to give up their baby boy to be put to death. And can you imagine how practically difficult and scary that would have been? Can you imagine what those three months of hiding that baby would have been like? Many of you parents out there can probably remember the sleepless nights you spent rocking your children in your arms when they just wouldn’t stop screaming their lungs out. But what about when your baby boy is doing that when the Egyptian soldiers are patrolling your neighborhood in the quiet of the night, looking to carry out Pharaoh’s murderous command? What a struggle! What stress!

But that didn’t stop the parents of Moses. They were going to do all they could to preserve their son’s life. Even if it meant taking a huge leap of faith and floating him down the Nile River in a mini ark made of papyrus. They were not going to obey the king’s edict, because they knew that it was right to obey God rather than men. And we should take time to clarify that point, because it’s so relevant for our Christian lives. Christians are to obey the governing authorities that God places over us, right?, because God gave those governing authorities for our good. So we obey the governing authorities, even when we don’t like the rules....unless our governing authorities directly tell us to violate the will and commandments of God. Then we must obey the higher authority-the highest authority. We obey God rather than men. And so, in this case, when the governing authority mandated the murder of children, it was absolutely right and God-pleasing for Moses’ parents to go against the Pharaoh’s command and to respect the sanctity of life and to protect their son’s life. And the Holy Spirit-inspired commentary of the writer to the Hebrews affirms that Moses’ parents did a God-pleasing thing.

So, this “Heroes of Faith” story gives us the opportunity to pause and think about the sanctity of human life, about why God considers human life so precious and so in need of protection and why murder is such a tragedy in God’s sight. Well, a simple way of answering that question is to say that God is the one who created human life, right? He’s the one who made us, who knit us together in our mother’s wombs. And therefore, since he is the one who gives us life, he also wants to be the one who decides when our lives come to an end. Our times are in his hands. And he especially wants to be the one who decides when our lives come to an end because he desires to give us our lives as a time of grace.

And that thought gives us opportunity to think about why there is a particular group of people whose lives are particularly precious to us and whose lives we will fight particularly hard to protect. See, even though Moses' parents were protecting the lives of their child who had already been born, I think this story gives us opportunity to reflect on why we feel so strongly about protecting the lives of children who have not yet been born. Why is abortion such a tragedy? And why is being pro-life such a priority for us?

Well, let's start here. First of all, God makes it clear in his Word that human life begins at conception. An unborn child is a true human being, and therefore abortion is murder. Think about this passage which King David wrote in the Psalms, Psalm 51:5. He says, "**Surely I was sinful from birth; sinful from the time my mother conceived me.**" Now, that passage proves that we are true human beings from the moment of conception. Because—follow the logic here—only people are sinners, right? Only people are subject to God's commandments. And it's people who break God's commandments and are sinful. And, if you are sinful from the moment of conception—and we are, because we inherit a sinful nature from our parents—if you are sinful from the moment of conception, that means that you are a true human being from the moment of conception. So killing the unborn is murder. And that fact alone is enough to make us want to defend the lives of the unborn, right?

But if we think through the implications of the fact that unborn babies are sinful people, that will deepen our resolve to defend the lives of the unborn even more. Because sinful unborn babies, just like all of us sinners, deserve God's punishment for sin. Unborn babies are spiritually dead in their sins. Unborn babies need to receive God's saving grace. They need the only thing, the only One, who gives them that grace and saves them from their spiritual deadness. They need Jesus Christ, the One who took our sins upon himself, the one who credits us with his righteousness, the one who makes us holy in God's sight. They need that grace showered upon them through the Holy Spirit's saving work—work that the Spirit does through the hearing of God's Word and through the washing of Holy Baptism. So we want all people to have the maximum amount of time on this earth to come to know God's saving grace in Christ. And we are especially concerned about ensuring that unborn children experience God's time of grace on this earth so they can hear about their Lord's saving grace and forgiveness. Let's have the same sort of zeal and the same sense of urgency in protecting human life, especially the lives of the unborn, as Moses' parents had when they protected him.

You know, there's one other aspect of what the writer to the Hebrews says about the faith of Moses' parents that we should really explore and discuss this morning. It says, "**By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.**" The writer to the Hebrews says that Moses' parents saw that he was no ordinary child. Looking back on what the Old Testament story from Exodus said—which, interestingly enough, was written by Moses himself, it says that Moses' mother "*saw that she was a fine child.*" So what exactly does that mean? Does that mean that God somehow had revealed to Moses' parents that he was going to play an important and special role in delivering the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, and this was, therefore, an additional reason that Moses' parents took the measures they did to preserve their son's young life? That kind of thing seems to be the implication. But we can't say for sure. There's nothing in the Scriptures that explicitly said that God had told Moses' parents about how God was going to use Moses later in his life to deliver Israel (and we'll hear more about that in the next weeks of church.)

But whether Moses' parents knew about God's future plans for Moses or not, what is clear is that God absolutely had in mind a plan to save baby Moses' life so that he could use Moses as his instrument later on in life. I mean, after all, think about how these events played out. Mom and dad hide their baby for three months until it gets to the point that the child just can't be hidden any longer. And so momma puts baby in a basket and floats him down the Nile River, where the daughter of Pharaoh finds him and falls in love with him and decides to adopt him as her own child. And baby Moses' sister Miriam shows up and asks Pharaoh's daughter if she wanted Miriam to find a Hebrew woman to nurse the child and take care of him, and Pharaoh's daughter thinks that's a great idea so Moses ends up being cared for in the home of his own biological parents, where he no doubt heard often about God's saving love and his promises of redemption. Could something like that happen just by chance? No way! This was God's plan to save.

You know, God's plan to save us is no less extraordinary or miraculous. He takes people like us, people conceived and born in sin, people who have devalued life, people who have hurt others, people who maybe have had abortions or supported abortions, people who have violated God's holy law, and he forgives every last one of these sins. He gives us grace, and he's blessed us with a time of life to hear about this grace. What a gift. Treasure that gift. Thank God for the saving grace he's given you in Christ, and thank God for the time of grace he's given you in your life. Amen.