
Church of the Beatitudes United Church of Christ

Courageous Women

A Sermon by

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Scripture: Exodus 1:8-2:10

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♯ God is still speaking,

In times of great suffering, when living conditions have become intolerable, people often fantasize about running away or finding a way of successfully fighting back, changing their situation. But once in a while people recognize opportunities to actually take decisive steps that truly can alter their lives and those they love for the better. Our faith story today is set in such a context with people trapped in a tragic living condition as well as courageous women who chose to embody a heroic series of decisive actions, each one choosing to color outside of the lines of their times, choosing to diverge the common way.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth

Then took the other as just as fair
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted wear
Though as for that, the passing there
Had worn them really about the same

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet, knowing how way leads onto way
I doubted if I should ever come back

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence
Two roads diverged in a wood
And I took the one less traveled by
And that has made all the difference.¹

Some people say that their lives, their votes, their actions don't make a difference. But in the world in which we live we know in our heart of hearts that this is not true. Each word we speak or don't speak, each step we take makes a difference. Each life, your life, has significance. None of us lives an unimportant life.

We have to decide which of the multiplicity of paths we will take. We actually face a cascade of decisions, whether we recognize it or not! There are times we wish not to decide or make a decision but keep looking back second-guessing ourselves or hope we can have another chance, another day! Yet, we know how way leads onto way, recognizing we will never come back to this opportunity again. Defining moments arise and we have to choose a path, a course, a direction

Some choices are personal. Were you ever like me where uncertain of what to decide you bent down and picked up a flower with petals, pulling off one petal at a time, reciting she loves me, she loves

¹ Road Less Traveled, by Robert Frost

me not? How many times have you acted or not acted on the wisdom of that strategy? Remember sometimes trying a second flower?

Or acted upon the question, “Will you marry me?”

Or had to react to information like “We’re having a baby!”

Or the knock at the door or the phone call with someone saying, “There has been an accident”

Life Choices that change everything forever!

At the time of the birth of Moses, life had become unbearable for the Hebrew people. Their ancestor, Joseph that had lead them into Egypt, kept them safe in a troubled time died. The Pharaohs that had loved and trusted his service also died. All the good things that Joseph had done for Egypt became old news. The new Pharaoh recognized that the Hebrew people outnumbered the Egyptian population, that if a crisis or war arose, the Hebrews might leave Egypt, and they were the cheap labor. Pharaoh grew afraid.

They had never been absorbed into the Egyptian culture and as they had continued to live inside of Egypt, they had transformed from being a small group of welcomed guests to a trusted body of cheap labor into despised slaves. Pharaoh couldn’t afford to lose this cheap labor force, so he decided to adopt a policy of genocide. He asked the midwives to kill all the baby boys at the time of birth. When the policy did not seem to be working he questioned two of these midwives Shiphrah and Puah on why the population was continuing to increase they chose to tell a fabrication, they said “... the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” (Exodus 1:19)

As the Hebrews continued to thrive, Pharaoh commanded, “Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.” (Exodus 1:22)

Pharaoh’s heart embraced genocide, motivating courageous acts of women. Their acts may be the first recorded practice of civil disobedience² They chose to take matters in their own hands, risked their lives by going against Pharaoh Command.

Among these Courageous Women were:

1. Shiphrah and Puah, unwilling to act as Pharaoh commanded to kill the Hebrew male offspring at birth,
2. Moses’ Mother, Jochebed and his sister Miriam, who raised Moses up until he was a few months old and then placed him in a basket in the bull rushes where Pharaoh’s daughter might find him,
3. Pharaoh’s own daughter who does. in fact. find him, recognizes Moses as a Hebrew boy and like many of our daughters ignores her father’s wishes, adopting Moses as her own

These were women living life with eyes and hearts wide open, willing to risk everything doing what they had to for love.

² [Francine Klagsbrun](#) said that the refusal of Shiphrah and her colleague [Puah](#) to follow the Pharaoh’s genocidal instructions “may be the first known incident of [civil disobedience](#) in history.” (*Voices of Wisdom*, ISBN 0-394-40159-X)

Women throughout history have taken courageous steps when times were unjust. Another example of this character is found in Rosa Parks. She was raised in a segregated South that tried to instill in her a sense that she was less valuable, less intelligent, and weaker than her white superiors. But Rosa was blessed with a family and faith that developed in her strength of character helping her reject the idea that she was inferior to any person, even after she spent a lifetime of being demeaned and humiliated, especially when she attempted to be involved in voter registration. Yet in 1955, it all came to a head when Rosa Parks decided not to leave her seat when a White man told her to. This decisive action propelled her on to the world stage a catalytic symbol for the Civil Rights Movement.

Tired and frustrated at the end of a hard day, she refused to give up her seat in the first row of the “colored” section on a bus. The driver demanded that the “Coloreds” clear out of the first row in the colored section so a white woman could have her seat. But Rosa said no. She was a courageous woman, demonstrating that even one person taking a decisive action even as small as not giving up your seat, can establish a fulcrum for hope that others can build upon in the battle against injustice.

Our lives make a difference! When we say no to injustice, we, like Rosa, Shiphrah, Puah, Jochebed, Miriam, and Pharaoh’s daughter, make a difference.

These Exodus stories are founded upon decisive acts of courageous women as they seek to depart from unjust cultural practices taking individual decisive actions that propel us on toward the hope of finding a way out.

A few years ago such a courageous woman arose within our congregation. She decided to go to seminary: Michele Mellott. She chose a road less traveled. She exited her known world within the laity of our church following in the ways of her father and grandfather embracing the challenge to become an ordained minister. Today we celebrate the next leg in her journey with tears of sadness and a pirate’s twinkle in the eye. She has made a way where there seemed no way. Her relational gifts have built bridges to the lost and lonely, offered hope to those in dire straights, and affection to those who believed they were unlovable. We wish her well and wait upon the announcement of her call to ordained ministry sometime in the next year.

How we live our lives make a difference! Be courageous, know your life has significance and purpose and that you are not alone. We are traveling a road less traveled lead by a God that is still speaking. Amen.