

Exodus 1:8-2:10

^{8,9} And a new king arose over Egypt who knew not Joseph. And he said to his people, “Look, the people of the sons of Israel is more numerous ¹⁰ and vaster than we. Come, let us be shrewd with them lest they multiply and then, should war occur, they will actually join our enemies and fight against us and go up from the land.” And they set over them ¹¹ forced-labor foremen so as to abuse them with their burdens, and they built store-cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Ramases. And as they abused ¹² them, so did they multiply and so did they spread, and they came to loathe the Israelites. And the Egyptians put the Israelites to work at ¹³ crushing labor, and they made their lives bitter with ¹⁴ hard work with mortar and bricks and every work in the field—all their crushing work that they performed. And the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives ¹⁵, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other was named ¹⁶ Puah. And he said, “When you deliver the Hebrew women and look on the birth-stool, if it is a boy, you shall put him to death, and if it is a girl, ¹⁷ she may live.” And the midwives feared God and did not do as the king ¹⁸ of Egypt had spoken to them, and they let the children live. And the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, “Why did you do ¹⁹ this thing and let the children live?” And the midwives said to Pharaoh, “For not like the Egyptian women are the Hebrew women, for they are ²⁰ hardy. Before the midwife comes to them they give birth.” And God made it go well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and became very vast. And inasmuch as the midwives feared God, He made ²¹ households for them. And Pharaoh charged his whole people, saying, ²² “Every boy that is born you shall fling into the Nile, and every girl you shall let live.”

CHAPTER 2

¹ And a man from the house of Levi went and took a Levite ² daughter, and the woman conceived and bore a son, and she saw that ³ he was goodly, and she hid him three months. And when she could no longer hide him, she took a wicker ark for him and caulked it with resin and pitch and placed the child in it and placed it in the ⁴ reeds by the banks of the Nile. And his sister stationed herself at a distance to see what would be done to him. And Pharaoh’s daughter came ⁵ down to bathe in the Nile, her maidens walking along the Nile. And she saw the ark amidst the reeds and sent her slavegirl and took it. And she opened it up and saw the child, and, look, it was a lad weeping ⁶. And she pitied him and said, “This is one of the children of the Hebrews.” And his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and ⁷ summon a nursing woman from the Hebrews that she may suckle the child for you?” And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Go.” And the girl ⁸ went and summoned the child’s mother. And Pharaoh’s daughter said ⁹ to her, “Carry away this child and suckle him for me, and I myself will pay your wages.” And the woman took the child and suckled him. And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he ¹⁰ became a son to her, and she called his name Moses, “For from the water I drew him out.”¹

¹ Alter Robert, *The Five Books of Moses*, n.d.

An Immigrant Prince

A sermon preached at North Prospect Union UCC, Medford, MA

Date: August 31, 2014 Rev. Dudley C. Rose

Scripture: Exodus 1:8-2:10

We have a rich story this morning. Its lyrical notes resonate with the past and future of the Hebrew people. The young child Moses is placed in a basket. In Hebrew it is the same word as the ark Noah built. As Noah's ark saved the future of God's creation from the flood waters, so the basket in the Nile saves the future leader of the Israelites from the river. And Moses would become the leader who would one day safely guide the people through the Red Sea waters. Time and again the promise of the Promised Land, nearly drowned, and time and again is saved by God's hand and unlikely means. The Hebrew child Moses, a play on words for "draw out from the water," Moses among those who Pharaoh ordered to be killed, is taken from the river at the behest of the princess, Pharaoh's daughter, to be raised in the royal family, an Egyptian prince.

It is a story filled with irony. The princess hires Moses' own mother to be the wetnurse. What Moses' mother gave up to save, her own child, was safely returned to her, at least for a time. And Pharaoh, not unlike Herod, who feared the "king of the Jews," Pharaoh feels the threat of the Hebrews, whose numbers are growing rapidly. Like Herod, he commands the slaughter of the Hebrew infants. Things in Egypt have changed since the day when Joseph saved the place as Pharaoh's chief advisor. This king knew not Joseph. This Pharaoh's preoccupation is not feeding the population but anxiety that Egypt will be overrun by the burgeoning population of the immigrant Hebrews.

It's a story as old as the hills and as modern as today. Rush Limbaugh speaks for more than many of us may wish to believe, and he sounds a lot like Pharaoh.

On a recent show, speaking of his constituency of white conservatives, he ranted, "We have to sit here and listen every day to how we're a bunch of racist pigs, sexist bigots, and homophobes — and how America is that way because of us — and yet all these people around the world want to come here! And all these parents in Central America are *sending* their kids here!"

Limbaugh is agitated about immigration and about all those people wanting to come here and sending their kids here and about the liberal left thinking it's okay. But why? Why is he so aroused? Never the subtle stylist, Rush immediately tells us why. "Despite what all the demographers say," he explained, "America remains a majority-white country. Despite the predictions, despite the hopes, despite the dreams of all the leftists of white people eventually becoming the minority in this country, it hasn't happened *yet*."

Like Pharaoh, Rush is worried about being overrun, about a day when the white majority will no longer be, well, the majority, and about the day when the white majority is no longer calling the shots.² The story of Moses, if Rush actually reads what it says, must give him fits. The immigrant becomes a prince and then eventually leads an insurrection. His worst nightmare.

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http://www.salon.com/2014/08/08/limbaugh_says_leftists_want_to_use_immigrants_to_%E2%80%9Cwrest_control_of_this_country%E2%80%9D_from_whites/

But before that happens, a lot leads up to it. The drama of Pharaoh's fear and the resulting persecutions are precursors to the final act, and they may well have had a lot to do with the way the events unfolded.

"Look, the people of the sons of Israel is more numerous and vaster than we," says Pharaoh. [slide 1] We must be shrewd. We must stop them.

They'll come any way they can. [slides 2-6, 10 seconds between them]

But, if we're shrewd and vigilant, says Pharaoh, maybe they will perish on the way. [slides 7-8, 10 seconds]

But if they get here, says Pharaoh, we can abuse them with burdens and onerous work, even their children. [slides 9-10, 10 seconds]

We can make their living bitter. [slide 11, 10 seconds]

This is a disturbing set of images and the tale they tell are a disturbing story in our time. Great fear and great human suffering intermingle at our borders. And for some the greatest fear is that those seeking to cross into our country will become, in Pharaoh's words, vaster than we and bring about our demise.

They might be right. They might be right, not so much because their fear is justified, as that their fear may cause them to do the very things that bring about their own worst nightmare.

In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Lear fears most that he will die old, unloved and mad. So desperately does he want to avoid this that he devises a contest among his three daughters. The one who loves him the most will inherit Lear's kingdom. Trouble is, the daughter who loves him most, and whom Lear loves the most, is the most honest. The other two daughters indulge in excessive flattery, but Cordelia's love is too authentic to be counterfeited. Lear's need for love is so great he cannot see through the deception. He banishes the only daughter who truly loves him. After several tragic twist and turns, Lear ultimately dies the way he most dreaded, mad and bereft.

The Oracle of Delphi tells Oedipus that he will kill his father and marry his mother. So repelled by the idea is Oedipus that he flees his homeland to avoid even the proximity of his family. Trouble is, his parents are not who he thinks they are. In fleeing, he actually encounters his real parents, unbeknownst to him, and yes, kills his father and marries his mother.

And in our story today, Pharaoh is trying so hard to rid Egypt of the plague of the Hebrews that he unwittingly brings the plague about. His order to kill the Hebrew male children causes events to conspire to bring one of them into his household. The child grows into the man Moses. In the face of Pharaoh's harsh treatment of the Hebrews, they are ultimately willing to listen to Moses when at God's command he rouses them to throw down their tools and leave Egypt. But Pharaoh is dependent on these slaves he loathes. Pharaoh chases after them. Moses leads the Hebrews through the parted sea. But then the waters return, and Pharaoh and his army are swallowed by the sea. Pharaoh's great nightmare was that he would be swallowed up by the Hebrews, and more tangibly than he could have imagined, he was.

Pharaoh could have done it differently. He could have remembered Joseph and realized that the Hebrews could be valuable members of the Egyptian society. Rather than seeking to exterminate them and rather than enslaving them, he could have treated them as productive, contributing members of the community.

Here's what Rush Limbaugh is afraid of. [slide 12] From 2010 to 2050 the white population is projected to grow about 1%. But the black population will grow by 56%, Asian by 142% and the Hispanic by 167%.

Translated into percentages of the population, [slide 13] by 2050 whites will be under 50% of the population. Hispanics and Asians, on the other hand, will have doubled their percentages between 2005 and 2050: Hispanics from 14 to 28% and Asians from 5 to 9%.

Looking at the numbers for people under 18 years of age, [slide 14] the white population now is just over 50% and in 2020 will be 49%. By 2020 26% of the U.S. population under 18 will be Hispanic.

Rush Limbaugh says, "Despite the predictions, despite the hopes, despite the dreams of all the leftists of white people eventually becoming the minority in this country, it hasn't happened *yet*." But he knows it's not long before it will. And he will moan, "Look, the people of Latin America and Asia and African Americans is more numerous and vaster than we. Come, let us be shrewd with them."

Well, I don't know about shrewd. But, come, let us be wise. Let us be good. Let us be moral. And let us build a dream together rather than a nightmare. In the words of Deuteronomy, let us choose blessing over curse. Let us choose life. Amen.