

## Lent Devotional March 26, 2020

### Scripture

Exodus 1:6-22

*6 Then Joseph died, and all his brothers, and that whole generation. 7 But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them. 8 Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 9 He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. 10 Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." 11 Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. 12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. 13 The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, 14 and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them. 15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 16 "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." 17 But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. 18 So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" 19 The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." 20 So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. 22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."*

### Devotional

#### **Dr. Bradshaw L. Frey '77/'83, Academia (2017)**

The violence of the cross casts a shadow over the entire Lenten season. How is it that we humans are drawn to violence when our experience of peace is so refreshing? Even as Jesus made his relentless journey to Jerusalem the specter of violence was all around (see John Pritchard's *The Journey to Jerusalem*).

For the people of Syria, Israel/Palestine, Nigeria, Afghanistan, and so many other parts of the world, violence has become a daily routine. And so we struggle and pray during Lent not to "understand" violence but to see it end. Particularly vulnerable to violence are children. They are the most severely affected by poverty in the U.S. and by violence worldwide.

Given this reality, it ought not to surprise us that as we open the book of Exodus, we're greeted by violence. The founding story of Israel is steeped in a deep suffering birthed of the greed and power of empire. For Pharaoh it is an easy transaction: sacrifice Israel so that Egypt may prosper. That transaction necessitates violence.

The narrative contained in Exodus 1:6-22 describes the lust of empire and the pain it inflicts on anyone on the margins. But woven into the narrative is the reality that God hears. God is at work to rescue a people—and especially to rescue vulnerable children. This violent beginning frames the entire narrative of Exodus: God's people trapped in empire.

The people of Israel would have to wait for centuries for the one described as the Prince of Peace to resolve the constant violence of life in the world. And yet the very violence of empire and sin was visited

on Christ himself. He knew the pain of violence suffered by vulnerable children and those on the margins. Yet he didn't respond with violence but with a sacrificial love given to empower his people to enact an alternative ethic.

**Prayer**

Great God of Peace, in this season when we look to the central event of our faith, your crucifixion and resurrection, work in us your Kingdom-spirit. Where empire insists on violence, let us insist on peace. When our world is busy with war, let us look to the cross to find a new way. Through Christ we pray. Amen.