



Westminster
Presbyterian Church
NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS

A Lesson in Compassion
Exodus 2:1-16, 23-25

The new Pharaoh had no memory of Joseph. Pharaoh did not know that before he was born that Joseph's ability to interpret dreams saved Egypt from starvation. Pharaoh had no memory of Joseph's family being welcomed by a previous Pharaoh to live in Egypt. All he saw was a group of aliens growing in number in his land, and so he had to do something, for he irrationally believed the Hebrews would join with Pharaoh's enemies and overthrow him. There was no evidence, but you know what fear can do to a person.

The new Pharaoh sent in his SS to arrest the Hebrews and force them to a life of hard labor, but his plan did not work, for the Hebrews continued to multiply. So Pharaoh ordered the murder of all the new born male Hebrew children, and he thought this plan would work. The mode of execution was to cast the babies into the Nile River, and the very river that was used as a weapon by Pharaoh was by God's providence used to deliver the people.

Hear the word as I read from Exodus 2:1-16:

Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said.

Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"

“Yes, go,” she answered. And the girl went and got the baby’s mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.” So the woman took the baby and nursed him. When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, “I drew him out of the water.”

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, “Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?”

Skipping to verse 23:

“In the course of those many days the king of Egypt died. And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. And God heard their groaning and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition.”

There was a missionary who was sitting at her second-story window when she was handed a letter from home. When she opened the letter, a crisp new ten dollar bill fell out. She was pleasantly surprised, but as she read the letter her eyes were distracted by the movement of a shabbily dressed stranger down below looking through the trash cans for food. The missionary, thinking that the shabbily dressed man might be in great financial distress, slipped the bill into an envelope on which she quickly penned the words, “Don’t despair,” and she threw the envelope to the man below. The stranger picked it up, read it, looked up, and smiled and tipping his hat, went his way.

The next day she was about to leave the house when a knock came to the door. She found the same shabbily dressed man smiling as he handed her a roll of bills. When she asked what they were for, he replied: “That’s the sixty bucks you won. ‘Don’t Despair’ paid six to one.”

Sometimes our compassion is misunderstood. I mean you drop ten bucks down to someone rummaging through the trash; the last thing you think is that he will place a bet for you.

Even if it is misunderstood, compassion is a godly trait. God’s compassion is demonstrated in the Exodus story where the text says, “God heard...God

remembered... God saw... and God knew.” God heard the groaning. God remembered his covenant. God saw the people. And God knew their condition and worked to free His people from bondage.

Everyday a man rode the commuter train from his suburban home to his plush downtown office. Each day the train took him through several impoverished neighborhoods. Each day he saw from the train’s window: decaying tenements, dilapidated public housing, and dingy streets! When the train slowed he could see the faces of hopeless people. He could see the unemployed gathered around a fire in a vacant lot, waiting for someone to come by and pick them up for day labor. He could see the children playing on rundown basketball courts, children who should have been in school, and he wondered who cared about them.

He often thought about the desperate people that he saw from the train. At night it became increasingly difficult for him to fall asleep. He closed his eyes, yet he still saw in his mind the depressing scenes of poverty.

He determined that he had to do something about it. So he did. Now, when he rides the commuter train, he pulls down the shade so he doesn’t have to look. He is at peace, or is he? If he has some peace, what price has he paid for it? Remember what Jesus said, **“What does it profit a man to gain the world and lose his soul?”**

Is it possible to resist the image of God in us? That is to hear, and see, and know, then like the commuter on the train pull down the blind.

God hears, God remembers, God sees, God knows, then God does something about the suffering. And for us who profess Jesus Christ as Lord, a church committed to allow God to build within us a godly character, our knowledge of human suffering should cause us to do something. And we do.

We are created in the image of God. We are made to live out the compassion and love of God in our lives and in our church. Yet, we are also fallen creatures and that holy image is distorted. Look at Moses. He looked upon the burdens of his people, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. Moses felt a level of compassion and he had to do something about it, so he murdered the Egyptian. The image of God in him was distorted. He had compassion, yet he committed an ungodly act.

The day following the murder, which Moses thought was a secret, he intervened in a fight between two Hebrews. And the one who was winning the fight asked Moses, “Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?”

Now Moses was afraid. He was a murderer and what was Pharaoh going to do to him after killing an Egyptian? So he fled from Pharaoh to the land of Midian. When he arrived there, he sat down at a well and the daughters of the priest of Midian came to draw water. Shepherds in the vicinity came and drove the women away and used the water that they had drawn to water their own flocks. Moses was faced with yet another act of oppression. Did he learn his lesson? This may have been a good time to shut the blinds and look the other way. He was burned once already. But when Moses saw the oppression he came to the rescue and delivered the women out of the hands of the shepherds, then drew water for them. There was no killing. Maybe Moses' compassion was becoming a little more like God's compassion.

When are we most like God? "God heard their groaning" – Moses looked on the burdens of his people. We are most like God when we look upon and see the suffering of others and rather than pull down the blind, we are convicted to do something in the name of Jesus Christ about the suffering.

Consider Pharaoh's daughter. She went to the river to bathe and saw a basket. When the basket was retrieved she found, of all things, a helpless baby. The text says, "She took pity on him, and she said, 'This is one of the Hebrew children.'"

This daughter of Pharaoh did not say, "This is a Hebrew child, so dump him into the river," No, her heart was moved, and she was filled with compassion. Her father wanted the baby dead, but something touched her and for a moment she empathetically entered into the Hebrew experience.

In our crowded and impersonal world we need a greater sense of empathy; to be able to identify with others to share their experience, to laugh with those who laugh and weep with those who weep. To exhibit the character of God revealed in this text, our pity must become compassion. Pity is a feeling, an emotion; compassion is rooted in the same feelings, but goes deep and issues forth in action.

Yet we can still down pull down the blinds. We see an old man, stooped over, wearing an old army jacket pushing a grocery cart with all his earthly belongings and say, "Well, he is not my dad." To read about a family who has lost everything in a fire and say, "Well, they are not family, maybe someone will step in and help." To know of a cancer patient who needs a ride to the doctor, and you think, "Well, she is not my mom; someone else can give them a ride." To have a friend living without the hope we know in Jesus Christ and say, "I wouldn't know what to say."

How can one come to worship God, and pull down the blinds? Isn't the very fact that we worship an indication that we seek to allow the image of God to grow within us? It is compassion and a desire to express the love of God that will not allow us to end our worship with a benediction, but leads us out of this building desiring to become involved with God's mission in the world.

It's not hard to make the point. Pity for those who simply do not have the upbringing or the skills to get a job issues forth in compassion as we follow through in a specific partnership with the Christian Women's Job Corp. Pity for children who do not have a positive role model, or simply have fallen behind in their studies, issues forth in compassion as we serve as mentors at Raguet Elementary School. Pity for those who are hungry issues forth in compassion by giving of our time, talents and money to purchase food, stocking shelves and distributing food at Project Hope. Pity for those who are captured within the orphanage system in Romania issues forth in a compassion when we offer our help to the NOROC program. Pity for those who are living hopeless lives issues forth in compassion when we proclaim the Gospel.

You see, compassion comes from a deliberate identification with another person so that we see things as the one suffering sees them, and feel things as they feel them. Compassion is God coming in the person of Jesus Christ not only to save the world, but in order to identify with the suffering in the world. That's the place to which God seeks to bring all of us, and may we travel that road together with our blinds raised high.