



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, AUGUST 23, 2026
EXODUS 1:8-2:10; PSALM 124; ROMANS 12:1-8; MATTHEW 16:13-20

THE ART OF RESISTANCE

I wonder what St. Paul would say to the women in our first reading. Just verses after the ones we hear today from Romans, Paul infamously tells us: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed." Tell that to our women from Exodus. It's striking that Pharaoh says to let the girls live; it's the women in this story who resist him. Their civil disobedience helps to bring about a new birth of freedom. So, who's calling the right play here?

Let's start with Exodus. We have Shiphrah and Puah, the midwives who break the law set by Pharaoh, who refuse to kill the Hebrew boys. They fear (or reverence) God more than they fear what their government could do to them, so they break an unjust law to preserve life. But they're not the only

ones who resist authority to keep Moses alive. Moses' mother and sister are part of the resistance too, as is Pharaoh's own daughter. All of them partner across "enemy" lines to make sure this child who will one day lead his people out of slavery survives.

What do we conclude from this? Maybe Paul is simply wrong. How dare we equate the voice of the emperor with the voice of God? We know what would have happened if Pharaoh was followed without resistance. Is Paul just sucking up to the empire? Perhaps he is saying what they want to hear, hoping that he and his followers might be left alone to practice their faith in peace. Except... he wasn't afraid to challenge the powers that be. He skirted the edges of any law that would prevent him from preaching about Jesus. He's not naïve about the government's potential to abuse power and, in fact, was beaten and imprisoned repeatedly. The last we

hear from him, he's under house arrest. So then, whose call do we follow here? What might a faithful response to an unjust government look like?

By now, it should be clear that the Bible does not speak with a single voice. We can't take one passage in isolation and base our actions on that alone. It's the conversation within and beyond the text that is holy and inspired – the wrestling with what God would have us do across times and cultures, across all forms of government. The truth is – we cannot simply recast the biblical roles with our heroes and villains and assume we're not being self-serving in the casting. We all like to assume that God is on our side and ours alone. Discerning the next right step is more complicated than that, as Paul points out in today's reading from Romans.

He begins by telling us to “present (our) bodies as a living sacrifice.” Given the number of vigilantes and insurrectionists who think they're doing just that, it's worth unpacking this a bit. Note that it's a “living” sacrifice. The call is not necessarily to get ourselves killed, although that may happen when we stand with the vulnerable as Jesus did. Perhaps it

means that whatever risks we take for justice – they're meant to be taken wisely and in the interests of preserving life.

Note also that we're presenting our bodies, as well as renewing our minds. It's not about lobbing verbal grenades from the safety of our computer screens. Some action is required. It might be protest. It might also be taking our lead from those most affected by the injustice and working more quietly behind the scenes to change things. Both choices can be faithful.

To assume otherwise goes against Paul's next piece of advice – i.e. not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. I know, it's funny hearing that from Paul – a first-class tooter of his own horn. But there are lots of ways to think too highly of ourselves. There's boastful pride, but there's also the trap of thinking that we're the only ones smart enough or committed enough to respond appropriately. Paul counters with the image of a body. By being part of the body of Christ, by definition, we are not all meant to have the same role. We need others to help us see what we can't – whether that's opportunities for courage or our own blinding

prejudices. We have partners in this work; we'd do well to value them.

Exodus tells us something else though, too. If fear is what's driving us, then we're probably headed in the wrong direction. Pharaoh's fear leads him to actions that are not only evil, but against his own best interest. He ends up trying to kill the very people he's afraid of losing. The ones who do right here are not controlled by fear. The midwives, Moses' mother and sister, Pharaoh's own daughter – they are all moved more by mercy than by fear and so end up being part of God's salvation – even if it takes another 40 years to see much return on that investment.

That might be the most important thing to remember as we consider our own resistance to unjust authority. Whatever we see now – it is not all there is. God wants so much more for us all. The arc of the moral universe is still bent toward justice. Just because we can't see past the next bend does not mean we're on the wrong path. When we stand with the vulnerable and act with courage alongside them, when we let others point out our blind spots and respond with humility, and when we let mercy drive us instead of fear, we are exactly where we need to be to let God guide our next play. In the Name of the One who gives us eyes to see, ears to hear, and the minds and bodies to follow – Amen.

Exodus 1:8-2:10 *[Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. 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." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, 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. The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "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." But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" 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." So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. 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." Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw*

that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. 5 The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him, "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."]

Romans 12:1-8 *[I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.]*



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