

A Beautiful But Precarious Life

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Exodus 1: 8-2: 10

A lone deer. I was coming to the office the “back” way the other day. You know, coming out the back end of Resort Drive, then a short ways down 602, then turning on Florist Rd. It was shining as it wound through fields and farms. Just before I crossed that little one-lane bridge, there he was up in a mowed field to my left. A lone deer. It was a young spike buck. He was standing perfectly still, almost as if he were some kind of pointing hunting dog. I imagined he was watching my car closely, sizing up the threat, looking for escape routes, if needed. I spotted him again as I went up the little hill past the bridge. He still hadn't moved. And then I could see him no longer. He was beautiful and as I drove away I wondered if he would make through the fall hunting season. A beautiful, but precarious life. Aren't they all?

You have to wonder. This little Hebrew boy baby's life was in danger along with so many others. Pharaoh was threatened by there being so many foreigners in his country. These immigrants had come in the time of famine and hardship in their own country, looking for food, looking for a better life. And you know, they didn't practice birth control and they'd just kept multiplying! And so, Pharaoh had thought to himself they really aren't Egyptians. You know, they really aren't like us; they're taking jobs away from Egyptians in the first place and what's to happen if we get in some kind of turmoil domestically, or some war? They have no real loyalty to Egypt, so they're likely to just leave when things get bad, and cripple our economy right when we've come to depend on them, or they might even join our enemies!

And so, you know the story, he decided the answer was to enslave them, and make their lives bitter and miserable. But, it seems these Hebrews refused to let even that keep them from life. And so they kept living and working and they kept having babies and raising families. So, finally of course, then Pharaoh decided the thing to do was to have all the male Hebrew babies killed. You remember how the story goes. One of the Hebrew women “conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months.” But, then she couldn't hide him any more, so hoping against hope, she got a papyrus basket and waterproofed it by plastering it with bitumen and pitch. And she placed her little boy baby in it and set him afloat in the reeds by the bank of the river. And the baby boy's older sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. A beautiful, but precarious life.

I just got word earlier this week that the son of some former church members I had in Newport News was killed last weekend by a drunk driver. Robert was 19 years old, and was set to return earlier this week for his sophomore year at VMI. His father, Richard, remembered how when Robert was about 8, and playing Little League, he wasn't doing too well. His dad was his coach, and jokes that he used to tell Robert to go into the outfield and climb over the fence. But, a couple of years and thousands of swings, throws and catches later, he was an All-Star. And that's the way it was with everything. He had this great desire to develop himself, this great perseverance. So, in high school he'd lettered in football, wrestling and track. He was an Eagle Scout. And he'd gotten a full ride at VMI. At VMI, he was the one running extra laps, hitting the ropes before the others, doing more pushups. He was the one going by people's rooms, making sure they all had their shoes and brass shined, making sure their beds were made. He wanted his company to be the best. Ant then in an instant last Saturday night... a drunk 23 year old, speeding through the neighborhood broadsided him. A beautiful, but precarious life.

When it seems like your life is over, or might as well be, what are we to do? Well, *our* story, the story of our faith, the story for today says that hoping against hope we put our hopes and dreams, our very life in the water somehow trusting in God. So, you remember, this young Hebrew mother with her three month old baby boy. She puts him in a basket and puts him in

the river. Maybe she knew that Pharaoh's daughter came there to bathe and knew her to be compassionate, or maybe she didn't. But, either way there was no guarantee, was there? In a time when Pharaoh was out to kill him, she puts her baby boy in the water, and has her daughter watch from a distance and she hopes.

She hopes. And you remember. Pharaoh's daughter does indeed come there to the river to bathe and she sees the basket over in the reeds. She sends one of her maids to go get it. And when she opens it up there is this little crying baby boy, and she has pity on him, because she knows it's one of the Hebrew babies. And, of course, very cleverly the boy's sister runs and asks Pharaoh's daughter if she'd like her to bring a nursing mother from the Hebrews to her to nurse this baby and subsequently brings the child's mother. And then when the baby is old enough to stop nursing Pharaoh's daughter takes him and raises him as her own son. And she names him Moses, which means "drawn-out" because she drew him out of the water. And it is a name that will have double meaning, for having been drawn out of water and his life saved, he will go on to draw his people out of the waters of the Red Sea, and out of slavery and lead them into the promised land.

But, do you hear this story of our faith? In spite of scary, precarious, broken-hearted circumstances, through love and compassion God makes a way for life. Friends, that is the story that is itself, life-giving. It is the story of our faith. We believe, don't we, that life is death and resurrection. And that's what we proclaim when we baptize. It is in full awareness of just how precarious life is that we bring our children to be baptized, isn't it? And in doing so, we recognize that death is part of life, in fact we proclaim that we ourselves will learn, and teach our children how to die to self and to culture for the sake of Christ. We recognize that death is part of life, but we say that it does not have the last word. We are raised up, drawn up out of the waters of baptism, already dead, already crucified with Christ, that we might live his new life with him.

Friends, all the deaths we ever die, even the deaths we die through divorce, the deaths we die through loss of job or house, even our own physical deaths, even the deaths we die in the loss of a loved one or our child...all the deaths we ever die are prefigured in our baptism. Our trust is (and I don't want to make this some glib thing, because it's hard to place our very life, our very hearts in the waters and let it go) but our trust is that in spite of all of that, the precarious waters of life will not finally drown us. In spite of it all, through love and compassion, God makes a way for life. It's the story of Moses, and it's the story of Jesus.

And, it's the story of someone else, whose name we all know pretty well. I think of another boy whose mother placed him in the water when he was very young. He was a kid with ADHD, and like all of those kids, a kid who was all over the place, unable to be still, unable to focus. He was being raised by a single mom and I imagine she might have been pulling her hair out a little bit. A beautiful, but precarious life. But, she signed him up for swimming lessons. She put him in the water and hoped that maybe it would be something that would at least occupy him for awhile. And lo and behold, he found his life. And at 11 years old his swimming coach came to her and said it's time to start training your son for the Olympics. That boy's name is Michael Phelps and we know the rest of his story, so far, don't we? Most times in the last couple of weeks when he's come up out of the water it's to receive a gold medal.

But, when his mother first put him in the water, there was no guarantee. She just did it in hope. That's what we do, isn't it? Hoping against hope we put our hopes and dreams, our very life in the waters somehow trusting in God. And, in spite of scary, precarious, broken-hearted circumstances, through love and compassion God makes a way for life. So, I say to you this morning what we say every time we baptize: "Remember your baptism and be thankful."

Amen