

Choices
Week 9: Call The Midwives

Robin and I love period piece shows and movies. One of the positives of streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, and Acorn TV is that you can find more of these. A **period piece** is a movie or show that is placed in another time period where they not only tell a story, but also try to do it in a way that is as **accurate to the time** it is set.

One of our favorites is "**Call the Midwife.**" It takes place in England, post World War II population boom. What makes this unique, is that this is the birth of midwifery in the modern era. Yes, there have been unofficial midwives in communities, who had skill in helping women birth babies. But in this story, some **Anglican nuns champion the cause of the poor** of London's East End neighborhood Poplar. Because people were no longer living in tight knit rural communities, where your aunt was a midwife, the knowledge was not getting passed down nor was it accessible. Therefore, the **infant mortality rate** was going up in the poor and working classes of England.

These women were brought into all kinds of situations where there were physical **challenges**, language challenges, cultural challenges, and even transportation challenges. They **rode bikes** to see their clients for home births. They blazed a trail in public health to where midwifery could become an occupation.

These midwives never had the **king of England** come to them and say, "we have too many poor babies, I want you to make sure that these babies don't make it through the birthing process alive. **In our story today, that is exactly what two Hebrew midwives were confronted with.** This made for some interesting choices.

The book of Exodus, where we find this story, is a continuation of what **God did in Genesis**. He created people and told them to **multiply and fill the earth**. This is what he is calling his special people Israel to do. In order to do this, they had to **leave Canaan, during a terrible famine, and go to Egypt**.

In **Egypt**, they continue to multiply. The Pharaoh, who welcomed them into his land, has died. **The new Pharaoh** doesn't see that as a good thing. **He doesn't want to join what God is doing as he blesses and prospers his people**. Pharaoh sees them as a possible military challenge. This explains his desire to get rid of male babies, because **little boys become men who become soldiers**.

Pharaoh is setting himself up against God and what God wants to do through his people. He is going to use his people, Israel, to show all people **how to know and be in relationship** with the one true God. He is also going to use this people as **the context for bringing his son**, the messiah, the promised savior of all people. **Then they will know their God, because he has come to them.**

Pharaoh's first attempt to slow the growth and influence of the Jews, was to work through the midwives. **That is where we meet our two people** who have some really important choices to make.

Our story begins in the first chapter of Exodus. ¹⁵ Then Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, gave this order to the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah: ¹⁶ "When you help the Hebrew women as they give birth, watch as they deliver.^[c] If the baby is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live." ¹⁷ But because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king's orders. They allowed the boys to live, too. ¹⁸ So the king of Egypt called for the midwives. "Why have you done this?" he demanded. "Why have you allowed the boys to live?" ¹⁹ "The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women," the midwives replied. "They are more vigorous and have their babies so quickly that we cannot get there in time." ²⁰ **So God was good to the midwives**, and the Israelites continued to multiply, growing more and more powerful. ²¹ **And because the midwives feared God**, he gave them families of their own. ²² Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Throw every newborn Hebrew boy into the Nile River. But you may let the girls live." Exodus 1:15-22

There is little mention of God doing anything except for being good to the midwives. It's almost as if they are **left up to their own ingenuity.** God is not yet breaking through with **some sort of display of power** and support for his people.

In a time when God is not simply breaking through and making something happen, the choice is this... Choose to do my part.

This is not the time to **passively wait around for God to rescue**, but to look for what my part is right now in what God wants to do. **And that usually begins with doing something that you already know fits God's character.**

The purpose of God is too big for them. But they can do their part by **honoring God's desire for the people to multiply.** "I can't save all the babies, but I can do something for the ones that I am called to help birth."

The Bible is clear that **Jesus is the savior.** He is the **only way** to know and be in relationship with God. It is also his desire **that no one be lost.** That's

a big job. It is clear that he wants **every group** to know about him before he returns. **That's a pretty big task. So what can I do? My part.**

I can look for the people who are **being drawn to me.**

We can't save everyone, but **the person's of peace.**

Or we can wait around, look for the signs that Jesus is coming back soon. We can complain about bad things are and how less Christian our country is today and dream about the "good old days" or we can look to do our part.

Their attitude was, "Not on my watch!" This was their responsibility, those babies.

It's like **two guys walking down a beach** after a huge storm. There are starfish all over the sand baking in the sun and dying. One of the men starts picking up starfish and tossing them into the water one at a time. After doing this a few times the other man says, "You do know that this isn't even making a dent. It's not making a difference." The first man picks one more starfish up off the sand and tosses it into the water. Then he says, "It made a difference to that one."

Acting in ways that are consistent with the heart of the God we see in Jesus. This is what we do when we don't see God doing anything and the mess looks too big to clean up.

When we ask this question, "What is my part?," it ignites our God-given gifts and abilities that he put into us for such a time as this. This is being obedient with what I have been given.

These ladies **knew that God wouldn't want them to kill babies**, particularly Hebrew babies, because it was God's promise to Abraham that they will multiply and prosper. **Keep in mind, this is before the 10 commandments** were written down, but they know Yahweh enough to know that refusing to kill babies was what he wanted.

There are, I believe, many Christians whose spiritual gifts lay dormant because they haven't demonstrated that they are going to be faithful with obvious issues of obedience.

- Illustration...

¹⁰ For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. Ephesians 2:10

Did you see that phrase, "so that we can do the good things he has planned?" We are created as masterpieces that are for good purposes. **But if we don't obey him in common situations we will never feel that nudge** in our hearts that tells us we are doing what God called us to do.

Still not clear on the connection between doing what is our part, that fits God's character and igniting our spiritual gifts? This should help. **"The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!' Matthew 25:21**

People don't hear that from God because they did something totally amazing, or earth shaking. They hear this from God because they did their part. **They started with obeying what they know.**

Always start with what you know? **Cleaning up the garage or basement...start with what you know.**

Have you felt like God is not doing anything or things are out of control? Maybe you are his plan. He isn't going to do something big directly, but he's going to use you.

We have to **wait until the next chapter** to hear God mentioned doing something directly. **²³ Years passed, and the king of Egypt died. But the Israelites continued to groan under their burden of slavery. They cried out for help, and their cry rose up to God. ²⁴ God heard their groaning, and he remembered his covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵ He looked down on the people of Israel and knew it was time to act. Exodus 2:23-25**

All of this rotten stuff of slavery and bondage continues as if God has not been doing anything. But that isn't the story of our midwives. **God was working indirectly through some very insignificant people.**

Between our midwives and this verse, Moses is born. He is raised in Pharaoh's house. After killing an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew. Later he finds out that someone has seen this. Out of fear he **runs away** to the Land of Midian where he helps out a local who takes him in. **He marries his daughter and settles down in Midian.** During this time, the **Old Pharaoh dies and a new one, not so hell-bent** on killing babies, takes over.

But here's the kicker, they don't get to Moses if these women don't do their part! The awe inspiring moment when God does something amazing never happens unless regular people do the small, but important, things that God has prepared them to do. **There will be miracles, terrible plagues, a**

pillar of fire guiding the people, a sea being divided as people walk through on dry land...**Moses was who God used in these cases.**

The next choice is a very basic one...**Choose to fear God or fear Pharaoh.**

Define fear...God is authority; he is king, I am not. Pharaoh really isn't king for these ladies.

Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. Proverbs 1:7

Their fear is not about trembling because at any minute God will crush you because you are so sinful. The fear of the Lord is about obeying him instead of someone else who we want to please and not disappoint.

Was the fear of the Lord giving our midwives knowledge of wisdom concerning what to do or not do? Yes, because they feared God, not Pharaoh; God blessed them with the ability to be clever, to understand how to maneuver around Pharaoh's plan to kill the baby boys.

"But Bill, I'm just not that clever." If life pushes you into a corner where it is difficult to obey and please others, then you become clever when you say, "I don't know what is going to happen, but I'm going to obey God."

- I'm not going to cheat to get what I want.
- I'm going to love my enemy.
- I'm going to look to serve, not be served.
- I'm not going to view others as a means to an end.

If you want to, put by the line who or what Pharaoh is for you?

I need you to **lean into this next choice** a little bit. It's not as obvious on the surface. **Choose to find my identity as one who belongs to the Lord of history.**

There are a million other places to find our identity. There are many things that we can look at to **tell us who we are** and how we **find our sense of worth** and belonging.

I think it would matter to people like us today, in a world that seems so out of control and so messed up and so dangerous, that we belong to the God who is in control of history. He started by **bringing light and life from the beginning** and even when the ones who loved him most turned their backs on him, **he continue to work to bring them back.**

You belong to the God of history. The one who, in the beginning, created everything and then came into our mess in the form of Jesus.

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,¹⁶ for **through him God created everything** in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. Colossians 1:15-16

Shiphrah and Puah decided that their identity was not in being Pharaoh's servants. Their jobs were a part of their identity, because they were an extension of what God wanted to do through his people Israel. They were saving lives so that Israel could multiply and prosper and become what God wanted them to be, a blessing to all people. **Being midwives was a part of their identity found in the God that has been moving through history and will eventually bring the messiah, the savior, the son of God, Jesus.**

That is when the invisible God, that they feared and trusted by faith, became visible.

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:9-11

Now we can find our identity in the king who became visible and has been brought to us. I am one in whom Christ dwells and we live in his unshakable kingdom.

Is this true for you? Have you made him king? Do you fear him, in that you know he is king and the one you want to please and obey? **If you have put your trust in him,** are you acting like someone in whom the king dwells? Right now maybe you are living like your world is shaking. And the world around us is. **People are fearful, angry, disappointed and unsure about who they are and where they are going. We can be the steady ones, the peaceful ones, the ones who aren't shaking.**

Recently I have been shaking a bit. The enormity of what I was seeing, that I am responsible for, started to get to me. But isn't that the problem? **Did our midwives look at the enormity of the mess they were in and freeze in their tracks?** No, they did not. They didn't just give in because there was no way that a couple of Hebrew women could stop the most powerful person in the world who was leading the most powerful nation in the world. **They knew that they belonged to the God who had**

moved through history and wanted to continue doing that through their captive powerless group of people called Israel.

This is your heritage if you are following Jesus!

Choosing to Follow:

1. Ask this question: What is my part of what God is doing in Eagle Ridge and the world around me?

This assumes one of the basic truths of dealing with God; **he is always working and always speaking**. The only question is will we listen and join him. Yes, you have a part. **If two powerless Hebrew women have a part in what seemed like a hopeless situation, then so do you and I.**

2. Talk to our Director of Mobilization, Tammy Naffie.

This is what she does. **She helps people answer that question** based upon how God has designed you.

God called the midwives to make the courageous choices that they made and those choices led to many baby boys being saved. One of those babies was named **Moses**, who God prepared and then used to set his people free from bondage and free to be what God called them to be. This is called "Call the midwives". **But really it is about your calling to birth what God has created.**

Let's close this time this morning by personalizing this verse. ¹⁰ **For (I am) God's masterpiece. He has created me anew in Christ Jesus, so I can do the good things he planned for me long ago. Ephesians 2:10**

Let's say it again for us as a church. ¹⁰ **For Eagle Ridge is God's masterpiece. He has created Eagle Ridge anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. Ephesians 2:10**