

Throwaways

Sermon notes for the sermon
Given by Rev. Dr. Gregory B. Young
On Sunday, August 21, 2011

It used to be that when something broke down we would take it to a repair shop to get it fixed. Then, when the price of getting it fixed at the repair shop started to increase we would take a stab at fixing it ourselves. Today when something breaks – a bicycle, a lawn mower, the coffee maker – we just throw it away and go buy a new one. We live in a throwaway society.

When our landfills started to become so full that they were starting to use up too much good land and when they had become so toxic with mercury and other heavy metals, we started to dump our throwaways in the ocean. When our oceans become polluted and heavy metals started making their way into the life of the seas we started hauling our trash by the barge load to less developed countries. Today we see the children of those countries rummaging through our throwaways looking for something useful that they can sell so that their family can eat another meal. The soil and ground water of these countries is polluted worse than we can imagine. Little or nothing is being done to change it because like our trash and broken things these countries and the people who live in them are all seen as throwaways.

Imagine a national ruler deciding that a foreign population inhabiting his country has become a threat and started looking at the little children

as lives to be thrown away. It happened hundreds of years before Jesus was born in the land of Egypt. It is happening today in places like Somalia and Sudan. The order given by Pharaoh was to kill the boys as soon as they were born. The orders given today are to kill the women and children or starve them to death. It is horrible to even imagine let alone see it happening or even being one trying to live through such a nightmare.

Pharaoh had ordered the midwives – the women who would be summoned to assist with delivery – to kill the newly born boys. I suppose that Pharaoh thought that boys would grow up to be warriors while girls would grow up to be non-threatening homemakers. He gave no thought to the girls, just the boys. If it was population control Pharaoh was after he had everything backward. I won't go into details but I believe you can figure that out for yourselves. Leave it to say that fewer men would not slow down population growth. Pharaoh just wasn't thinking. All he knew was that the people who had come to Egypt in such small number when Joseph was alive were now growing every day. He needed a solution to solve what he believed to be an immigrant problem. So he started to see the children of Israel as throwaways. "Tell the midwives to kill every baby boy born to an Israelite woman," Pharaoh ordered.

What Pharaoh didn't expect or even consider was that the midwives would practice what we call today civil disobedience. That is they refused to be party to such an abominable act. Shiphrah and Puah knew in their hearts that it would dishonor God and bring shame upon their

people. So, when Pharaoh summoned them and asked why we wasn't seeing dead baby Israelite boys being buried by their parents the two midwives explained that the strong Israelite women were able to give birth before they could come on the scene and follow orders. It was too late, the boys were born and Pharaoh's covert plan could not be enacted. Pharaoh did not expect women to be so strong and it appears that Pharaoh did not expect women to be able to think outside the box as Shiphrah and Puah had. Pharaoh had to find another solution to his perceived problem.

Instead of trying to find a way to negotiate peace between his people, the Egyptians, and the Israelites, Pharaoh decided to order his troops to carry out the planned genocide. Pharaoh ordered his people to throw all Israelite male children, all of the boys, into the Nile River. They became food for the crocodiles or just simply drown because they couldn't swim. Imagine the horror and outrage among the Israelites, having their little sons pulled from their arms and then thrown away to their death. Imagine the beautiful, life-giving and life-sustaining Nile filled with floating, lifeless bodies. Isn't that what we witnessed in the 1990's in Rwanda; hundreds of bodies floating down the Kagera River; almost one million people seen as a threat and treated as throwaways? What was Pharaoh thinking? Did he not even begin to imagine how this might come back to haunt the Egyptian people?

You can imagine that mothers were taking all kinds of desperate steps to keep their baby boys safe. "Take me," they would plead through

tears of desperation. Some tried to leave the country; others tried to hide. There was no use because what Pharaoh had said to his people must be obeyed and so the slaughter of innocent baby boys continued.

Enter into the story a young man from the house of Levi and his wife.

They had a daughter and now the wife had given birth to a son. Dread filled the house. How could they hide him and spare him from death. The mother and her daughter built a little ark, just as Noah had done. The baby boy was placed in the ark and found life just as Noah, his family and all of the animals. The baby boy's salvation came from a princess of Egypt who arranged to have the baby nursed by his mother and then arranged for the baby boy to become her son, Moses. This was an act of compassion and an act of civil disobedience since it was the princess's father, Pharaoh, who had ordered all Israelite baby boys to be killed. Again, Pharaoh had failed to consider just how strong and creative women can be. He was outsmarted by his own daughter. Little did they know that Moses would become the instrument of God who would lead his people from freedom after inflicting on Egypt what had been done to his people.

Things have not changed much in the course of time. We still have the problem of how to deal with immigrants and how to find ways to justly handle issues that arise between competing populations in countries. No country is exempt as we witnessed in Norway recently. Those who are perceived to be a threat and powerless are treated as throwaways. Human trafficking is at an all time high and is now a

larger problem than drug trafficking. An still we see the images from the news media and streamed over the internet and we gasp in horror. God's heart is broken each time one human being sees another human being as a throwaway. We are called to be the Shiphrahs and Puahs of our time. We are called to be the mother and sister of baby Moses and find ways to preserve life. We are even called to be like Pharaoh's daughter disobeying the command of the land in favor of a higher command – the command of God and of God's creation. We are called to be the witnesses of God's justice and to seek to find ways of speaking out on God's behalf.