

**“IT’S AN INSIDE JOB”**  
**Romans 12:1-8; Exodus 1:8-2:10**  
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I begin today with a story... a true story.

Once, long ago, in a country far away a new king came into power, the king assessed the situation in his land and saw that his own people, his own race, would soon be outnumbered by another group, a group of foreigners who also happened to practice a different religion. Indeed, that group had grown in numbers and were strong in body and mind. The king worried that his own people, those in power, would eventually be overrun by these newcomers. So, he ordered them to be rounded up and to be forced into slave labor. As a people, this group was instantly marginalized and treated brutally. But even though all of this, the people remained strong in their love and faith in God. That strength of faith intimidated the king.

Our story turns to two women, who happened to be midwives in the land. They were women of deep faith in God. They also happened to be from and worked among this group of immigrants. The king summoned the midwives. He demanded that when they delivered babies, that they kill all the boy babies. The girls could live. But not the boys.

The women left the king. However, they made the decision to not obey the king. They continued to deliver boys as well as girls. And all of them lived.

The story continues, that when the king learned of this, he was outraged and summoned them. “Why have you done this?” But the women, the midwives, were very clever, and said, “The women of this community of

immigrants are strong, stronger than those of your country. They deliver before we even get there.” In other words, it’s too late. And so, the King’s plans were thwarted.

And the story goes in the Book of Exodus that God dealt well with the midwives... whose names were Shiphrah and Puah – a somewhat rare naming of women in the Hebrew scriptures... and they lived in Egypt under the rule of Pharaoh and served among the Hebrew people. We know that the story continues in Exodus Chapter 2 that a young Hebrew boy was born. And just as the midwives had done, his mother saved him, and hid him for three months and then, she put him in a basket and hid him in the water. That’s when the daughter of Pharaoh himself found him and took him in. He would later become the leader of the Children of Israel... Moses. His story begins with the incredible courage of two midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, who risked their lives to do what they knew was right in the sight of God.

Why did I tell the story that way? Why did I vaguely disguise the situation and not put it into context? Because I wanted us to hear the story in a new way. We have seen that same story played out again and again in the history of the world: You have leaders, who are insecure and intimidated by those who are different from them and their communities in some way, or who perceive a potential threat to their power and control... when these people stand up to be treated fairly, to do what is right, in the name of their faith many times, in order to be free and obtain justice, it’s oftentimes in the face of extreme danger... How do they do it? Where do they find such courage and fortitude?

How, for example, did Jewish men and women survive the Nazi concentration camps and maintain their faith when everything around them was destroyed and as they witnessed the killing of millions of their

loved ones? How did Christians stand up at risk to themselves and their families to hide Jews who needed safe passage?

How did men and women withstand the scourge of slavery in this country and flee or help others to flee to safety?

How did men and women during the civil rights movement stand strong in their faith, not responding with violence, but with love and courage, to not only survive but bring change? How did they do it? How did they maintain faith in such horrendous situations? For example, how was it that Martin Luther King Jr, in the midst of witnessing and experiencing great pain, suffering and injustice, even the death of so many during the civil rights movement... could say, "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear"?

The answer is in our scripture lesson this morning... it starts inside. It comes from a renewing of our minds and experiencing transformation from within which provides uncommon strength. It comes from meditating on the heart of God through prayer and meditation and through the reading of scriptures. Those things provide a sense of groundedness which cannot be shaken, even in the midst of great tumult, chaos and even danger. The transformation which comes from a renewing of our minds opens us to what God wants for us in our lives.

Those is 12-Step programs have found this practice this to be true... step 11 of the 12 steps says: ***Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God; as we understood God; praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.***

But it's difficult, especially in these days, to experience renewal and transformation when we are bombarded by a barrage of divisive and negative messages each and every day, right? Political arguments

between even the best of friends on social media, issues of the day which leave us outraged – wherever you stand – don't provide a solid diet of peace. Fears of the Coronavirus can overwhelm even those who are usually the most serene. And yet, even in the midst of this, our faith calls us, not to turn our heads, but to keep engaged with the stranger, to lend a hand to the suffering, to stand up for justice.

**Inner spiritual transformation is not meant to be used as an escape from the world around us... but rather as a means to keep us engaged in the realities of the world in which we live... but doing so with the love and peace and grace of God.** In a sense, we are buoyed up to withstand great conflict, without being destroyed, because our inner lives provide us with spiritual resiliency and courage to act.

You've heard the phrase "garbage in, garbage out," the computer term which refers to "sloppily programmed" inputs which inevitably lead to incorrect outputs. Well the same thing is true with our minds... if you/I focus on anger, fear, strife, division and resentment; if, as the scripture says, you think too highly of yourself that you ought; if you hurt and ignore others... the output in your life will not be God's best for you...

So... I want to conclude with a few moments to put this into practice. I want to lead you in two minutes of guided reflection... I will be reading some of the next verses in Romans 12:9 and following, a continuation of what Paul says right after what Jessica read this morning. I invite you to receive these words as if God were speaking to you, to guide you... put aside all mental critique, and just listen...

And as I read, you may either close your eyes or you may look at the screen and see a video I took of the seascape from my recent trip to Cape Cod at Harding Beach in Chatham. Quite honestly, it's difficult NOT to be renewed just by experiencing that sight...

*Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.*

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

*May it be so... Amen~~*