

## First Baptist Church of Fitchburg

1400 John Fitch Highway Fitchburg, MA 01420 Phone# 978-345-5622

*August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost*

Pastor: Rev. Meredith H. Christian      Musician: Marilyn Cater      Song Leader: May Goff



*"To Mother With Love"  
-Exodus 2:1-10*

### **Welcome and Announcements:**

Good morning Congregation, I am happy to be back in Massachusetts. My time in service over this summer has invigorated me and, God willing, prepared me to launch ahead into this new era and season with you in joy and hopeful anticipation for the future of this church and all who dwell within this house of God.

Office hours and Bible study will resume this week. You are still welcome to share your concerns and celebrations with me or your deacons. My email is [meredithhchristian@gmail.com](mailto:meredithhchristian@gmail.com) and phone (774) 276-0505.

### **Call to Worship:** (In Unison)

**Eternal Father, for some of us it has been a busy week, and for others of us it has been a quiet week. For some of us it has been a happy week and yet some of us have been sad. Whatever our situation, and whatever our experience, You call us to share our prayers and praises in Your house. We lift up our voices in gratitude, knowing that throughout our week, Your Spirit guides and strengthens us.**

### **Invocation:**

Thank You, Lord, for this day, for a safe trip, for this house of worship, for each of these sisters and brothers in Christ, and for those who are contributing to this worship experience. We worship You because You alone are worthy. We especially thank You for Your providential care for us, and the salvation You offer through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

### **Gloria Patri:**

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be  
world without end. Amen, Amen.*

**Hymn:** **"Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" # 59** (Click on link/Traditional) <https://youtu.be/ZD4B9Q6nTo0>  
(Or my personal favorite version of this hymn <https://youtu.be/mfBGQpslyT8> )

### **First Reading:** *Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17*

*"Lord, You have been our place of refuge in all generations. Before the mountains were born and You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. You turn man back into dust And say, "Return, O children of men." For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, And as a watch in the night. You have swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep; In the morning they are like grass which passes away. In the morning it flourishes and passes away; toward evening it fades and withers away.*

*Do return, O LORD; how long will it be? And repent in regard to Your servants. O satisfy us in the morning with Your lovingkindness, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad as many days as You have afflicted us, and the years we have seen trouble. Let Your work appear to Your servants and Your majesty upon their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; and give permanence to the work of our hands; Yes, give permanence to the work of our hands.”*

### **Celebrations and Concerns:**

Gratitude for the Lockhart family and prayers for their future ministry. Prayers for Cortney, and for those dealing with illness or facing procedures. Prayers for this city, nation and world for unity and patience.

**Silent Prayer:** Let us take a moment in silent prayer.

### **Pastoral Prayer:**

God of grace, thank You for the gift of motherhood: for the joy of giving birth, for the delight of loving a child, for the unfolding of relationship that comes with time. From mothers cradling babies, to adults caregiving for aging parents, the relationship of mother and son or daughter is a gift from You.

Thank You for all who mother us; biological or adoptive mothers, caregivers, relatives and friends, women who have been there for us, who have made us who we are. Thank You God that even though mothers may fail us, You never fail us and that You mother us through Your love.

We are not perfect people, and in our intimate relationships, we are imperfect. For all the ways we have as parents or caregivers, disappointed or failed our children, forgive us. For all the ways we have as children, disappointed or failed our providers, forgive us. Give us the grace to say, “I’m sorry,” and the wisdom to make amends. Help us to remember to honor the position of parent, as Your Word commands us to do.

For mothers today we ask for patience, to allow our children to be children; we ask for vision to see the long view, and the impact small parenting choices can make; we ask for self-control, so that we may model gracefulness in stressful situations. Above all these we ask for love, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray,

***Our Father**, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

### **Children's Message: (Offered by Debi Cross)**

#### **Why? Because She Loves You!**

As you all know, today we are celebrating Mother's Day. Today we honor our mothers and tell her how wonderful and special she is. I have brought several things this morning that remind me of my mother. I want to show them to you and tell you about my mother.

Oatmeal! My mother always insisted that I eat a well-rounded breakfast. Now, my idea of a well-rounded breakfast was a chocolate covered doughnut, but my mother did not agree! I always had to eat something like oatmeal, toast, and orange juice. Why? Because my mother loved me and wanted me to grow up to be strong and healthy.

Books! Some of my friends went home after school and watched cartoons on TV, but not me! My mom always insisted that I do my homework before I watched any TV. Why? Because my mother loved me and she knew that a good education was one of the best things she could give me.

Clocks! I am reminded of my mother by a clock because she always insisted on knowing where I was every minute of the day. If I wanted to go to a friend's house after school, I always had to call my mom and ask for her permission and tell her where I was going to be and what I was going to be doing. Why? Because she loved me and wanted me to be safe.

Dishwashing detergent! I guess my mom never heard about child labor laws. She had this idea that every member of the family should chip in and help with the chores around the house. I had special jobs to do and I

was expected to do them without being told. Why? Because my mother loved me and wanted me to learn that a happy family is one where everyone works together.

My mom isn't here anymore. She's in heaven. She probably has the angels dusting off the pearly gates and sweeping the golden streets! My mother was like that! Sometimes I thought I was being mistreated, but I wasn't. My mother did the things she did because she loved me and wanted what was best for me.

*Prayer: Father God, we thank you for our mothers. Help us to remember that when we think our mother is mistreating us, she is just showing us how much she loves us. Amen.*

### **Blessing of the Tithes, Offerings and Gifts:**

Let us at this time be thoughtful as we lift up our offerings and ask the Lord's blessing upon them. May they be used in the ministry of this congregation. May we share joyfully, believing that they will fulfill Your purpose as we contribute towards the calling that You have for each of us, this congregation, and this community. Amen.

(Tithes, offerings, and gifts are greatly appreciated as a means to continue to care for our facilities, the needs of each other, and our local and worldwide community. We thank you for your pledges at this time and ask that you **Please Pray over your gifts** and mail them to the church at **1400 John Fitch Hwy, Fitchburg MA 01420**).

### **Doxology:**

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow  
Praise Him all creatures here below  
Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts  
Praise Father Son and Holy Ghost.*

### **Sermon Text:            *Exodus 2:1-10***

*“Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got him a wicker basket and covered it over with tar and pitch. Then she put the child into it and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to find out what would happen to him.*

*The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the Nile, with her maidens walking alongside the Nile; and she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid, and she brought it to her. When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the boy was crying. And she had pity on him and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children.” Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women that she may nurse the child for you?” Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Go ahead.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. Then Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child away and nurse him for me and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed him. The child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. And she named him Moses, and said, “Because I drew him out of the water”*

### ***“To Mom With Love”***

On the Sunday that Mother's Day is traditionally celebrated our church was closed this year due to the pandemic. Depending on your age, for some of you mothers, there has never been a greater need for mothers than these past months when families and children have been locked in together, in need of maternal tenderness or affection, in need of someone to care for them, protect, nurture and care for them, and help give rise to the notion that out of this turmoil, we will, as a people, give birth to a greater nation, amazing innovations and a fresh excitement for the things of God. To be a mother means so much more than giving birth. To mother someone with love in our hearts is more than a feeling, it is love in action, as this morning's Scripture reading so beautifully illustrates.

This is, what seems like the beginning of the story of Moses. His parents, according to *Exodus 6* and *Numbers 26* were called Amram and Jochebed, or Yocheved in Hebrew. Both of Moses' parents were descended from Levi, son of Israel, which because of the calling God would place on the lives of their children, would become forever known as the priestly line of the Hebrew people.

Many of you know that I like a prequel. I like to know the backstory of what I am hearing in order to gain a bigger picture of the situation. So, there should be no surprise that I went digging into this text and found that the Hebrew writings, in their histories, expound even further on the situation before us in chapter 2 of Exodus.

The Parashah and Mishna say that Amram and Yocheved had their first child, a daughter, during the beginning of the oppression of their people by this Pharaoh, who knew not Joseph (*Exodus 1:8*), nor respected the Hebrew people living in his northern territory. They named their first child Miriam, for it was a time of bitterness for their people. Four years later they were blessed with a son, named Aaron. It was a year after the birth of Aaron, when Miriam was five years old, that she was called on to help her mother, who was performing the duties of a midwife during a surge of growth in their burgeoning extended family. Tradition says that the people called Yocheved *Shifrah*, meaning beautiful, and Miriam *Puah* (*Exodus 1:15*), which means "lass" or "little girl".

Despite Pharaoh's best efforts to keep the Hebrew population down, the Histories go further to explain that as the mother and daughter were unwilling to destroy the sons of Israel, an edict went forth demanding that all males under the age of 2 were to be tossed in the Nile (*Exodus 1:22*). Meanwhile, God then blessed the actions of Yocheved and her daughter in preserving the lives of the infants of Israel by increasing their family (*Exodus 1:20-21*), for "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward." (*Psalms 127:3*). So when Miriam was 7 and Aaron was 3, the Lord blessed their family with a second son.

Yocheved had no need to hide her pregnancy, after all, baby girls were permitted. Once it was made known that she had delivered a boy child, however, her situation seemed less of a blessing. She saw that he was beautiful (v.2), just like his mother, and could not bring herself to harm him, so she hid him for a time, but after 3 months of concealing the gender of her new child, she looked upon his lovely face, and must have realized that she could no longer avoid the problem. She had to deal with her situation and make a decision, before her son was discovered and one would be made for her. This explains why Yocheved made the reed basket for her son.

He was put in a basket, not an ark, but a basket, just as a bread offering. It is unknown what her full plan was for the baby. She had clearly made the basket sturdy and water tight, giving the impression that she was intent on his protection and survival. She then placed it among the reeds in such a way that he would remain hidden there rather than sending the basket adrift down the Nile, the way it is so often portrayed in Hollywood.

The mother tucked him in the reeds and trusted his future to God. This is all we are clear to know. I cannot imagine what it must have been like for her to wade away from the bank that day, perhaps looking back over her shoulder time and again the way I did on the first day that I was made to drop my child off at preschool and then walk back to the car as if I were confident that they were in good hands. But to leave him in water, with so many animals and dangers, well, as I say, it must have taken tremendous strength, or fear for the alternatives.

I do not get the impression that this was an easy activity, after all, "Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for the child she has borne?" (*Isaiah 49:15*). It seems to me rather that this mother entrusted her son to the Father knowing that she could no longer provide what he needed. To leave him in the village, among so many other mothers who had seen their sons taken from them would have exposed him to great danger.

There are many different types of mothers. There are snow plow moms, who try to clear away anything potentially negative in the path of their child. There are helicopter moms, who hover over them all the time, right there to swat away any adversity that might try to gain proximity to their precious child, and then there are what I very affectionately call smotherers. I have one of those. They love us with a fierceness and intensity that grips their child so tight they know their kid from the inside out, leaving absolutely no room for mystery.

I love my smotherer, and surely all these types of mothers are adored for the intensity of love and devotion they have towards their young, whether they are born from their body or not. There is, I believe, a time to plow, a time to hover, and a time to smother, and God has a way of sending children what they need, even when it is not in the form they would prefer. Even a mother who seems to ignore, neglect, or abuse their child can strengthen that child for adversity, though it is always truly sad to me to see one of the people charged most with caring for a child be the one who hurts them the most.

Anyway, as I read this I cannot help but wonder how many mothers since Eve have known the pain of sending off their children and had to entrust them into God's hands; young mothers, sickly mothers, mothers of soldiers, even college students, all having to wave goodbye, turn and walk away resolved in the wellbeing of their

babies? It happens to them all at some point. How much harder with one so small, who is truly defenseless as this little boy was alone in his basket.

Even so, he was not alone. God put it in his sister's heart to watch him. Little Miriam would have been accustomed to watching over babies, and so it is no surprise that she should desire to watch over the spot where her little brother lay. She watched as she saw that her mother had managed to put the baby close enough to a fine house for the basket to have gained the notice of Pharaoh's daughter, who just happened to be in the area, and in need of that spot in the Nile at the time.

God put it on Pharaoh's daughter to be at the right place, to be observant to her surroundings, or perhaps to encourage the baby to cry out from the reeds. Whatever the cause, the princess had a mind to investigate what she was observing. The Bible says that she saw a child in need and had pity on him. She knew he was not one of "her people" but her heart saw him as her own responsibility. In that moment, this woman chose to mother the baby out of compassion and to show love toward him as she would her very own son.

This was not her son, yet as it turned out, one who was known for their experience with infants happened to be nearby, and the little Hebrew girl offered to find a Hebrew woman who could nurse this baby until he was old enough to no longer require milk. This was handy. The princess was not capable herself of providing what the child required, so she was willing to provide for him through another. She gave the Hebrew woman a suitable fee, so long as the woman promised to return the child to her when it was time (*Exodus 2:9*).

This turn of events would have given Yocheved and her family the ability to enjoy the child without the need to hide him, while under the guise of serving Pharaoh's daughter. The child would have nursed for 2-3 years. After that time, when the family would have become so attached to the little guy, the mother did release him to a better future, in the hands of another, who would him as her own.

The princess named him Moses, one who is drawn out, due to the way that he was brought into her life. She could not have known at the time that Moses would one day draw out the Hebrew people from among the Egyptians. In this odd series of events, Pharaoh found himself providing for the enemy within his very house, much like one day Herod would fail to see another Deliverer residing right within his midst in the region that was charged with supporting his palace.

After all, Moses was somewhat of a precursor, a shadow and hint of what the people of Israel would be able to one day expect from their Divine Deliverer, Jesus, the Christ. He lived among them, just as Emanuel, God with us, lived among us. Moses and Jesus had many things in common. He lived among the Egyptians, just as Jesus had in His youth, and Moses led the people of Israel out of the bondages of slavery, where Jesus leads all who follow Him out of the bondages of sin and death.

There are so many other similarities, but this day my focus is not so much on acknowledging the tremendous amount of parallels between Moses and Jesus, as it is on the hearts of the mothers in Moses' life. As English philosopher Edmund Burke once observed, "the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Nothing did not seem to be a thing that the daughter of Pharaoh was willing to do in the face of a child in need.

The photo I chose best resembles what I feel the situation looked like as I read it. The Princess of Egypt would have had Egyptian features, and would not, I assume have been able to hide the fact that her child, being of middle eastern Jewish decent, would not have resembled her. People were bound to notice the variations as time went by, yet she loved him enough to mother him anyway, and more than that, as her very own son (*v.10*).

As we have read this morning, this was a time when the future of the Hebrew people were being threatened with extinction. This story would not only repeat itself in the time of Christ, but also in the 1930 & 40's during the World War II era, when yet another tyrant arose who knew not Joseph or Jesus. He too saw the Jewish people as a threat and demanded their destruction. Once again, the mothers of Israel would cry out, "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more" (*Jeremiah 31:15*).

There are an overwhelming amount of stories about mothers who found themselves having to secure the future of their children by sending them away during the years of the Nazi occupation. Mothers across Europe, who sent off their children with relatives, friends, or strangers in hopes that they would one day be able to find them

or call them back home. Mothers across the U.K. who sent their children off by the thousands to live in the country side where it seemed safer than the edge of the coast that was threatened by bombers, and mothers and fathers who were very much aware that they would never see their children again.

Robert Middleman shared his story of being a child who was forced to join Hitler's Youth or face being killed for not supporting the government while he was a boy growing up in Germany at the time. What made this so much more traumatic for him was that he carried the secret that he was half Jewish on his father's side. Little did the enemy know that they were feeding and housing the very same people they were seeking to destroy.

Those times were truly evil. Even in the face of such a thing, how many of you know that God is so good. The Lord would use even the horrible situation of the second World War for His good in that the situation would eventually draw out Jews from the four corners of the earth and move them back to the land which He had given to their ancestors and the descendants of Israel forever.

Christians are likewise called out from the sea of people to live a markedly different life than those around them. We live in hostile territory. Even though we may be cared for and receive nourishment and support from this world, we are not supposed to look like everyone else. Jesus draws us out of our sinful lifestyle and culture and calls us to be set apart as a people whom He preserves for His own purposes. The Lord works through people to accomplish His will in the earth. (*Philippians 2:12-13*).

In this way, our God mothers us, as He acts out of love in our situations. We do not always understand why He puts us in what seems like dangerous, or at the very least unfavorable situations, but if we trust that He is a good Parent, then we can rely on the fact that God will see to it that we receive the type of care that will prepare us for the things He has in store for our future, just as He did with Moses, who would require an Egyptian education, knowledge of the life and customs of Pharaoh and a relationship that allowed him into Pharaoh's presence when God would one day send him to deliver His people out of bondage.

You too, may be destined for greatness. Your challenges may have been just the changes you needed in order to equip you for the adventures in your future. This current health crisis is preparing you for what is to come. You are learning how to stay safe, what is truly important in your life and I pray, what you are truly capable of when the distractions in your life are removed. You are each made for such a time as this (*Esther 4:14*), my friends.

I implore you not to fear the sound of the river of doubt and danger swirling around you, for your God knows exactly where you are, His Spirit dwells within you, and Jesus has already paid the price for victory on your behalf. God is, I believe, sending people into your situation that will bring you into the next season of your life, mother you with care and educate you for your future walk. They may not look like you expect, but they will have a divine assignment over your life, which is to say that that which may seem like it is seeking to destroy you, will only make you stronger (*Nietzsche*), by the grace of God and to His glory.

To mother with love is to reflect the heart of God. He may have already called on you to mother someone, or may do so in the future. I pray you answer that call. As for those of you in need, who seem to be stuck in the reeds of dismay and despair, all that you need do is, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understandings. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths" (*Proverbs 3:5-6*), just as Moses did in the basket. Thank God for Godly Mothers, for they are truly used of God. Amen.

**Hymn:** "*Faith of Our Mother's*" (insert) (Click on link) <https://youtu.be/Y0V4MBqj1IE>

### **Benediction:**

May we go forth into our week, knowing that we are embraced by the love of God; a love that is sweeter and more tender than any we have ever known and with the sure and unwavering confidence that those of us who are in Christ, Jesus, are sons and daughters of the Most High God. Amen.

*May the Lord bless and keep you all.*

Works Cited