*Shiprah and Puah*

Exodus 1:8-2:10

A little history might be helpful in understanding this week’s scripture from Exodus. Joseph had been sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. Joseph ended up in Egypt, was imprisoned once due to false charges brought about by his master’s wife, But, having interpreted one of Pharaoh’s dreams he was placed in high standing as overseer of Egypt’s food, second only to Pharaoh in power. His family, desperate for food traveled to Egypt knowing that Egypt had wisely stored food in preparation for the great famine of the region. Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and invited the entire family to come live in Egypt at least for the duration of the family. The Israelites stayed and now 400 years later, they are still there. Here is what happened. (read Exodus passage)

Yesterday, we got caught in an hour delay in traffic on I96 coming back from Lansing. We were in the left lane, knowing that the right lane was closed several miles ahead. And, as usually happened some took advantage of the absence of cars in the right lane to get “ahead” and try to get back in line close to the lane closing. Several trucks tried to prevent cars from doing so, but some of these cars simply went around them on the right shoulder. At one point things got pretty chaotic and people seemed to be everywhere. It did take an hour of complaint, resentment, almost name calling, and a bit of anger before we got to the closed lane. And still the traffic didn’t move fast enough for our satisfaction. We wanted to get home. I had a sermon to write and Joe hadn’t checked his email. But Joe has a great sense of God housed within him. By the time we got through the traffic and were speeding along again, the most amazing event took place. It was sunset time and golden splashes of setting sun were coloring the western sky. It was like a Florida sunset. The words that popped out of Joe’s mouth caught me and moved me to a calmer, more relaxed state. He said, “You know, we wouldn’t have seen this sunset if we hadn’t been stuck in that traffic.” Joe’s sense of God had delivered me from all that resentment and unhappiness.

Shiprah and Puah had a great sense of God. They knew firsthand, the oppression the Hebrew people were under. Pharoah had become threatened by the sheer numbers of Hebrews in Egypt. He began to fear them, lest they become powerful and overcome the Egyptians. And who knows, maybe there was unrest among the Hebrews. His fear grew disproportionate to his ability to reason things out. He did not see far enough ahead to realize that the genocide he wanted to commit would greatly reduce his workforce years ahead. A whole generation of males would be missing. So his fear prompted him to instruct the midwives to kill all the male babies when they helped birth them. But, Shiprah and Puah had a different vision, a vision that came from their sense of God. They risked their very lives to make sure that the male babies lived. When Pharoah confronted them, again their sense of God gave them an explanation that saved their lives.

God had continued to bless the Hebrew people and they were vigorous in their births and very productive. The midwives were correct in their assessments but risked much in their explanation to Pharaoh. They knew who their God was and what He was capable of doing. Their courage and God’s grace allowed for the birth of Moses and the sequence of events that would free the Hebrews in the great exodus.

What is our sense of God these days? Do we have a sense of God’s grace in our hearts? Do we have a sense of God’s love in our hearts? It seems lately that the anti-religious people are becoming the vocal ones in our society and people who have a great sense of God are becoming more silent. Sure, we hear a lot about God in churches on Sunday morning and in our Bible studies. But I wonder if God has been silenced in society in general. Have we become politically correct at the expense of sharing our views about God with people who may need a word of hope? When was the last time we mentioned God in an everyday conversation with our neighbors, our family or our friends? When was the last time we “stood up” for God in our deeper conversations about life? When was the last time we had a deeper conversation?

God wants people to know about the great love He has for creation. God does not want his voice to be silenced in his people. Joe’s voice on our way home was God’s voice reminding me that traffic hang ups are not a ruling force in this world. God’s beauty and wonder and giving thanks and paying attention to God are!

Our complacency in speaking about God leaves the door open for others to distance themselves from having to think about whether there is a God and some of the more profound questions about life itself. Being complacent about speaking out about God leaves the door open for evil and some of the horrendous acts we see happening in the world. We come to church not only to hear a word from God, from each other, but to reassure ourselves that God is important in our lives. Is God any less important to others?

Another incident happened this week that reassured me that people are willing to express their sense of God using the internet. A young man, probably about 20 years old now, from one of my former churches, sent an email for Joe, something that was important enough for him to want to share with others. His sense of God prompted him to send this. I would like Joe to help me share this dialogue with you:

If we are going to help God change this world, our voices must not be silent. We need to draw attention to faith that transforms people. We must be daring to speak out when the time arises, not as one of those who are termed “kooky Christians” but as one who has a great sense of God within them, an assurance that God is present in this world.