

Sermon “Do the Next Thing Right” Sermon August 23rd - Mark Knauss

Did you ever want to do the next thing right? I want to read a few quotes that may apply to how you have felt.

Martin Luther King. “The time is always right to do what is right.”

C.S. Lewis. “Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching.”

Mark Twain. “Do the right thing. It will gratify some people and astonish the rest.”

(Taken from the website <https://www.azquotes.com/quotes/topics/doing-the-right-thing.html>)

Our Old Testament story today is about a few women who did the next thing right. The Jews came to Egypt via Joseph. **[SLIDE – picture of Joseph with his brothers]**. Briefly, Joseph was one of 12 children, and his father showed favoritism to him over his brothers. His brothers became jealous and sold him to some merchants who were traveling by. They didn’t do the right thing. Then the brothers lied to Joseph’s father and told him that his son was killed. Joseph ends

up in Egypt, and God makes him successful. **[SLIDE – picture of Joseph in Egypt].**

Eventually, Joseph is reunited with his brothers and father. Furthermore, Joseph saves his family and others from a famine in the land.

[SLIDE - “Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. Exodus 1:8”]. This king of Egypt (or Pharaoh) was concerned that the Israelite people were growing considerably in their numbers and could one day rise against him and the Egyptian leadership. Pharaoh’s solution was to oppress the Israelites into forced labor. Life was harsh for the Jews, but yet their population grew. So Pharaoh decided to have the midwives keep the numbers of Jewish people down by killing all newborn Hebrew infants who were male. Living through such an experience must have led the Israelites to ask, “Where is God in all of this?”

Two Hebrew midwives (Shiphrah and Puah) are given orders from Pharaoh to kill all male newborns of the Israelites. Notice the power dynamics here. We have the all-powerful Pharaoh versus the midwives who were pretty low on Egypt's social power structure. And what do the midwives do? They ignore the Pharaoh’s orders. We read in **[SLIDE Exodus 1:17, “But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live.”]**

Though we have a power difference between the midwives and Pharaoh, we also have a gap in knowledge of God. Pharaoh does not know the story of Joseph and the Jews. Conversely, the midwives did, and they feared God. That means they were in a relationship with God that involved knowledge and trust. Where is God in all of this? God is not with the all-powerful Pharaoh, but rather with the midwives. For the midwives following God meant doing the next thing right- and they let the male infants live.

The midwives were living at an intersection of the divine and humanity. In those moments when they held a newborn Hebrew baby boy, they knew that keeping him alive was a faithful moment of doing the next thing right. We read in **[SLIDE - Exodus 1:20 “So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong.”]**.

This saving act of the midwives allows God to raise a leader who will one day lead the Hebrew people out of slavery – Moses. At a few months old, his mother places Moses in a wicker basket in the reeds of the banks of the Nile. She can't keep him, for if the authorities find him, then his life will be taken. She strategically plans it so that Pharaoh's daughter will find him. Pharaoh's daughter takes Moses and raises him as her own. God's plan of deliverance for the Jewish

people comes through the hands of the faithful midwives who ‘do the next thing right.’

‘Doing the next thing right’ is a useful secular mantra. It acknowledges that every moment is a chance for us to take a step in the right direction and this can be helpful when we feel overwhelmed and need some guidance. It is in these small steps of doing the next thing right that determine the journey our lives and hearts will take. These steps form the foundation – the rocks that we stand on.

For example, we have daily opportunities to help others. We can help a disabled person in a grocery store, cut the lawn for an elderly neighbor, or tutor a local school child.

Perhaps we are passionate about everyone having enough to eat. So, we give money to the food bank and donate our time there as well. **[SLIDE – picture of a food bank]**. These are examples of great things to dedicate ourselves to when choosing to do the next thing right.

But what sets us apart from the rest of the world? When people ask, “Why do you donate your time to this cause?” As Christians, we hear the question as, “Why are you a Christian?” This is our opportunity to partner with the midwives and respond, “because we fear the Lord.”

How do we as Christians define ‘Do the next thing right?’ I have a few points from our story to help us break this down.

Remember, we began by acknowledging that Pharaoh did not know Joseph’s story. **[SLIDE – 1. Know God’s story.]** We know God’s ceaseless efforts to be in a relationship with us. Though humanity fails God, time, and time again, God continually picks up the pieces of the relationship. Our blessing this and every week has been that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

[SLIDE 2. – Know how God’s story intersects with your life]. That’s what the midwives experienced. With each new baby boy, they saw God at work. They knew that they were standing at a crossroads of God’s will and the will of the ruling powers.

When you know God’s story and pay attention to how God is at work in your life, then... **[SLIDE 3. – Look for God in all your decisions and do the next thing right].** Every time the midwives held a baby boy, they knew what God wanted them to do. God’s heart was in their hearts. Similarly, we pray that God’s will becomes our will.

The Pharaoh didn’t know Joseph. He didn’t know God’s story. In our Gospel reading today, Peter knows God’s story. Not only that, Peter’s life is intersecting with God’s story as it unfolds right in front of him in the person of

Jesus. Every day was a learning experience for Peter as Jesus lived amongst the people and went about teaching and healing. Jesus is the ultimate revelation of what kind of God we have.

When the disciples wanted to send the crowds away to eat, Jesus commands the disciples, “You feed them.” 5,000 hungry people were fed because God wants all to be provided for. When the Canaanite woman presses Jesus for mercy, Jesus grants it. Her daughter is instantly healed because God’s kingdom is for all of humanity. **[SLIDE – picture of Jesus reaching through the water]**. When Peter loses his focus, when his faith falters, he sinks into the water. Jesus is there to pull him out. Peter is not alone in his faith. Jesus is the revelation of God – because the heart of God will forever want to dwell in the hearts of humanity.

Jesus asks the disciples, **[SLIDE – Matthew 16: 16 “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”]** Hundreds of years earlier, Pharaoh would not have been able to answer this question because he didn’t know God. Peter knows Jesus is the Messiah because Peter let God dwell in his heart. This enabled Peter to see and respond to the heart of God standing right in front of him – in Christ.

For the midwives, the intersection of God's story and their lives came when they held the male Hebrew babies. For Peter, the intersection of God and humanity was standing right in front of him and asking, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter responds, "You are the Messiah!" Both the midwives and Peter 'do the next thing right' because they respond from their hearts where they let God dwell.

The midwives saved countless lives. As a result of their faithful actions, we read, "God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong." When Peter's response is to call Jesus the Messiah, and we read the following: **[SLIDE – Matthew 16: 17 "And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven"]**. When we let God live in our hearts, sometimes doing the next thing right is obvious and familiar.

Jesus continues, **[SLIDE - Matthew 16:18 "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."]**. The faith of the midwives and Peter is available for us all. Such faith builds a foundation that no Pharaoh can prevail against. Thanks be to God! 'Doing the next thing right' for us comes from a relationship with God through Christ.

Shiphrah and Puah are two midwives whom God used to save the nation of Israel. Peter's faith is a rock upon which the church on earth is built. We can do God's will here on earth by following their lead. **[SLIDE 1 - Know God's story. 2 – Know how God's story intersects with your life. 3 – Look for God in all your decisions and do the next thing right.]**

AMEN