

“Unraveled: When Our Plans for Our Children Unravel”
Exodus 1: 22, 2:1-10

Parents have a hard choice this fall in much of our country: Do they send their children to school or not? How do you make such a decision? It is not easy knowing what to do when safety is involved. Sending children to school in a pandemic could have major health consequences, while having them stay home without school could also be tough emotionally and financially. Parenting is never an easy job but having to do it during difficult and dangerous times is even more challenging. We see that for refugee or migrant parents. Escaping the violence or starvation in one place, even if the destination is not certain, are not choices parents like to make. We are also aware of how difficult it is these days to not visit our elderly parents or grandparents to protect them from exposure to the coronavirus. We know this kind of struggle from other experiences when we have had to make difficult decisions for our loved ones in order to reduce their suffering or protect them from harm. Such decisions can be very painful to make. So how do we find grace when our plans for our children or our loved ones unravel?

To help us with this, we will look at the example of a mother who found a way through a major time of unraveling. This mother's name is Jochebed. She was the mother of Aaron, Miriam, and Moses. These three became the leaders of Israel who helped liberate the people from being enslaved in Egypt. Without these three, God's plan for liberation might have not taken place. And so we give thanks for the wisdom, courage, and tenacity of a mother who did everything in her power to protect her child, even as it meant allowing her baby to be adopted to protect his life.

This was a time of great fear and oppression for the Israelites in Egypt. Not only were they enslaved there, the king saw them as a major threat and decided to commit infanticide against them to keep their numbers down. At first, he ordered the Egyptian midwives to kill the male babies they delivered. But when that didn't work, he gave the order to have all male babies killed.

Two women and a girl saved the life of one of the most important leaders in the history of the Israelites. The two adult women were Jochebed and Pharaoh's daughter and the girl was Miriam who was about five years old. Pretty amazing to think that the salvation and delivery from slavery for the Israelites depended on the compassion, courage, and wisdom of these “minor” characters in history who had very little power and influence in the face of the tyranny and violence of the king.

Jochebed had to devise a plan to save her son. She used the invention of the Egyptians of papyrus to make a water-proof basket for Moses. He was thrown in the river, which was the command of Pharaoh, but he was thrown in a basket that protected him. He was also thrown near where one of the king's daughters would be. But the one who watched out for him was his 5-year-old sister. That is who made sure that he was not going to float down the river where he would be eaten by a wild animal or killed by other dangers. How many of us would trust a newborn baby to float down a river with a 5-year-old looking out for him? If a grown woman was there to watch for the child, she would have been easily

spotted by the authorities and so a child had to be the one to do the job! Out of desperation and with a sense of faith, this was the only solution possible. And it worked. The king's daughter knew that this was a Hebrew baby, but she took a chance for the sake of love. She raised him under the nose of the king who wanted to kill his kind. All these actions were unlikely things to happen, but by grace in the face of the unthinkable these three females saved the life of a baby who grew up to be the one to lead his people out of Egypt. I can only imagine the fervent prayers of Jochebed for the safety of her son!

As our plans for our children and our loved ones unravel, we can learn from the example of these women. They faced this great challenge with faith, courage, creativity, and compassion. In the face of the king's greed, violence, and racism, these three withstood the challenge with the help of God. They used their skills, their wisdom, and their love to find a way out of no way. When all seemed impossible, they didn't give up. They pursued an unlikely path and had to improvise along the way. What is really great about this story is that the same spirit of courageous faith, creative initiative, and compassionate action was present in Moses' own life and in how he led his people out of slavery.

Moses had to overcome incredible odds in his life and the example of faith and courage that he had from these three women in his life carried him through so much. They prayed him into life, and he in turn prayed others into greater life and freedom!

There is a saying that goes something like this, "Faith is caught and not taught." I believe that was exactly true of the life of Moses. His mother, his adopted mother, and his sister showed him the way to subvert the powers with wisdom and love. They not only persevered his life, but they also preserved and nurtured his soul. Moses grew up to be the man who could liberate a whole people through his faith. Moses did not have a stable growing up story. He lived with a hidden identity. He was moved back and forth as a baby. He could have grown up to be a criminal that would take out his pain on others. What made the true difference in his life was the love and faith of these three women who risked everything to save him. They modeled for him what it meant to love and to care.

No matter what happens with the school year this fall, the invitation of this story is to focus on faith and love. That is what is going to carry our children during these times. It may seem like we are putting them in a basket and floating them down a river at this point. Yet, through love and faith, new solutions will emerge: Solutions that are courageous, creative, and compassionate and which will help them to live up to their God given potential.

In the spirit of the faith of Jochebed, take time to speak to your children and to your loved ones about faith. Grieve this time of loss together! Don't avoid difficult topics like racism or death with your children and family members, but always remember to do it with faith instead of fear. Fred Rogers, in a broadcast of Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood following the assassination of John F. Kennedy said: "The best thing in the world is for your children to be included in your family ways of coping with the problems that present themselves...particularly now, in this very difficult time, in our nation. There are those who will find a great comfort in being able to sit and watch a television mass, or a funeral-so

long as it is included in the family.... For other families, maybe a walk by a river, a walk in a favorite place. For others, maybe just a strong arm around the body of a small child as you walk.”

As we look at the unraveling of our plans for our children or loved ones, we are invited to continue in faith. Whatever tools or decisions we make, they have to preserve their lives and their souls. In the face of great odds against us, our work is to model a spirit of faith, courage, creativity, and compassion. Remember that love and faith always find a way and not even Pharaoh can stop the powerful love of three young seemingly helpless women! Amen.