

03.30.25 ~ Lent 4

“Women Who Are Called”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Exodus 2:1-10 ^{NIV}

¹ Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, ² and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. ³ But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

⁵ Then Pharaoh’s daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. ⁶ She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. “This is one of the Hebrew babies,” she said.

⁷ Then his sister asked Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?”

⁸ “Yes, go,” she answered. So, the girl went and got the baby’s mother. ⁹ Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.” So, the woman took the baby and nursed him. ¹⁰ When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, “I drew him out of the water.”

Leader: These Words of Calling Are from God.

People: Thanks be to God!

Esther 2 & 4 ^{NIV} excerpts [2:3-18; 4:12-16]

² ³ . . . bring all these beautiful young women into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king’s eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. ⁴ Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti.”

⁸ When the king’s order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king’s palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. ⁹ She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants . . .”

¹⁰ Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so.

¹⁷ Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So, he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti . . .”

⁴ ¹³ [Mordecai] sent back this answer: “Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. ¹⁴ For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and

your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

¹⁵ Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶ "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

Leader: These Actions of Responsibility Are of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Loving and faithful Lord, we come this fifth Sunday to worship you and to learn more of your vision of ministry callings. You comfort and rescue us when we call out for you, but do we answer your call when you reach out for us and our spiritual gifts and talents? Fill our hearts and minds with your words of guidance, call, and direction. At this dawning of Spring and annual emphasis on women in leadership, let us take small or giant steps toward answering your call to serving the kingdom in new ways through prayer, testimony, study, missions, ministry, and service. Strengthen our resolve toward justice and equality, seeing that you call those who love you and equip them accordingly. May **your** voice empower, refresh, and strengthen us for the weeks to come. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

It's event season at the Missions Center! Yesterday, not only did we have our monthly Friends and Family Breakfast, but in the afternoon, in this very room, our newest group held their first concert or recital, the Kohuka Ensemble. There were close to 100 guests, food, family, friends of the singers, and beautiful music from about 21 Japanese women, a pianist, and a Tokyo and Julliard trained singer/director, who showcased three additional classical pieces. The most touching was how they stated their gratitude to our church for rehearsal space and our new relationship. They even dedicated "You Raise Me Up" in English to our church; it was moving and much appreciated. Their reception and management of our space were done with excellence, beauty, and respect. In April, we have our church Easter activities, and in May there will be two or three more large events, and in June, the recital season, so watch for announcements

in the Vision and Bulletin. If you would like to help with any of these, I would appreciate a conversation.

Around the country in the month of March, Baptist Women in Ministry were invited to preach in traditionally male pulpits, and attention was directed to the advocacy still needed to uphold and empower women to proclaim the Word. This year the emphasis was on advocacy, so churches made SBC decisions, ordained women for the first time, or changed personnel policies to reflect women's needs to add maternity and parental leave. As stated in our bulletin, I am here in this pulpit weekly because of your foresight and support. So first, let me thank you! Not just for calling me to serve, but also for your frequent recognition and encouragement to pastor in somewhat challenging times. I am grateful and I love serving God through you and this church!

There are many women leaders in the New Testament: Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary of Bethany, Lydia, Dorcas (also known as Tabitha), Phoebe, Priscilla, and more. We rarely speak of the women of the Old Testament, so today, we're looking at them. On the bulletin, you see a host of women at the river and you're familiar with the Moses story. Let's look at it today from the perspective of the women who rescued the Israelites' deliverer. The context is important to recall. At the end of Genesis, Joseph, Jacob's son had died and a new king who did not know him rose up to become Pharaoh; it was King Ramses II. The children of Israel were multiplying fruitfully. The King felt threatened by their growing numbers, and he wanted a strong master race of Egyptians. Ramses enslaved the children of Israel, and in Exodus 1:15, he declared to the midwives that if a baby boy was born, he was to be killed. He

wanted no one to threaten his own son's leadership inheritance. The midwives did as they were told.

A man from the house of Levi married a Levite woman and had a son, a child she hid for three months. She could no longer keep him safe, so she built a basket of reeds and pitch to help it float, and as you heard, hid the basket in the grasses. As God ordained, Pharaoh's daughter and her maids went to the same area to bathe and found the little Hebrew baby. Moved, she saved him. The maids were afraid, but Pharaoh's fearless daughter was called or perhaps destined to save the future Israelite deliverer. One maid selected the baby's mother to nurse him and as he grew the baby was adopted as Pharaoh's daughter's son. He was educated alongside Pharaoh's birth son. She named him Moses because he was drawn from the water.

We know this story well, but did you ever think about the risks the women all took? Pharaoh's daughter and primary maid were God-fearing women even though Egypt worshipped other gods and idols. Pharaoh's daughter's humanity and compassion must have been from God's hand. There is some archaeological evidence that depicts the story. We leave it here, knowing that God can work through anyone, just as he did through the women who conspired to save an enemy.

The second woman of honor who led her people to safety was Esther. She was a Jewess who had the chance to help her nation. The context was that King Ahasuerus (often referred to as Xerxes 1) had divorced his wife, Vashti, for disobedience; and Haman, the king's chief minister had created a harem of selected virgins to present to the king with the hope of his choosing one to be the new queen. So, Esther

submitted herself to this process. The passages detail the beautification and purifying steps each woman took to get the king's attention.

Although it was not a seminary, theological preparation, Esther was ready to respond to God's call on her life. Haman wanted to kill the Jews out of jealousy, and because they answered to a higher God, they refused to give him deference. Haman especially despised Mordecai, Esther's adoptive father. Chapter 3 explains the Jewish genocide he planned.

Now, having spent much time with Esther, the king was attracted to her and chose her to become his new Queen. He threw several banquets to honor her, but when Mordecai heard of Haman's new plot, Esther decided to keep her nationality a secret. She had a serious choice to make—to use her favor with the king to inform him of Haman's insubordinate plan or to keep silent and watch her father and friends die unnecessarily. Mordecai convinced Esther to risk everything to save her people; he reminded her that perhaps Yahweh had chosen her for such a time as this. She fulfilled her calling, saying “if I perish, I perish.” It was not a death wish, but rather a declaration of her trust in God.

That's what calling and ordination are; ministry and missions require that trust in God's plan not our own. Even serving in the military is a calling for some—to serve someone greater than oneself. Women and men are called into ministry, and most take some time to discern it. Trust, faith, *Agape* love, and commitment are all required to obey God's call. There is Biblical precedent. On the [Baptist Women in Ministry](#) website, there is a booklet summarizing examples of women called into ministry, called “A Baptist Reflection on the Bible and Women in Ministry and Leadership” by Meredith Stone. It's 24 pages I can copy, or you can read

online. You may think it's too late for you but no! You don't have to preach or pastor a church to be called into ministry or missions. God has much Kingdom work for you to do right here in Annandale or in your own neighborhood. The important thing is to pray and ask him what is your calling now at this time in your life? How can you serve? What training might you need? Who can help? My calling story came late in life yet I thank the Lord for it! Remember Joel 2:28-29:

²⁸ And afterward,
 I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
 Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
 your old men will dream dreams,
 your young men will see visions.
²⁹ Even on my servants, both men and women,
 I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

Men, you are our allies, and we need more supporters. Well done here. And women, we call you and your children and your children's children to hear God's call and talk to a trusted pastor, deacon or leader. Women's voices are necessary in this world. Amen! ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we thank you for your teaching and your empowerment. Open our minds and hearts to accept the divine calling on our lives to serve others and through our actions, serve your Kingdom. May you encourage us and fuel our mission and purpose to share our faith and gratitude with others. Lead your men and women into new areas of calling with strength and assurance. It is in Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.