



Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene Ian Hicks Preaching

Exodus 1:8-2:10 Romans 12:1-8 Matthew 16:13-20 Psalm 124

Transformation

August 23, 2026

May our blessed Lord who is here amongst us, open our minds and hearts to His ways, reconciling us and setting us free.

If today's readings were all events happening now, imagine what our sensationalized news headlines might look like:

"Abandoned baby found in basket in reeds."

"Princess rescues baby. Sister brokers deal. Baby safe."

"Pharoah causing chaos."

"Paul calls on people to transform their minds!"

It's a different perspective, isn't it?

In our Collect today we pray for unity. "Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in **unity by your Holy Spirit**, may show forth **your power among all peoples**, to the glory of your name." Can we strive to achieve God's power of unity among all people?

Thinking deeper we might ask ourselves, "Is this possible?" Simultaneously we are faced with Pharoah's violent cruelty in Exodus. Paul then complicates this

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further in Romans: “Do not conform to patterns of this world!” “Transform your minds!” What does that mean?

Confusing? Let’s try untangling the emerging parallel thoughts.

Recently we were reminded of Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers, in their jealousy. Last Sunday we learned of Joseph reuniting with his brothers in Egypt when they came to buy grain. Did they or could they ever realize how lucky they were by letting him live instead of murdering him as first planned?

Joseph had risen to significant levels of authority, fortunately for them. They returned a second time to Egypt to buy grain and Joseph suggested they bring their whole family back, about 70 people. This ensured the survival of his family and the fledgling Israelite population. Pharoah was gracious telling these early Israelites they could live in the land of Goshen, along with their flocks. A most generous offer or gift! Fast forward about 400 years, we’ve just heard about the suffering of the Israelites in Egypt. The current Pharaoh knows nothing of Joseph and all the good he did historically and he is giving the Israelites a very tough time.

The Israelites are a robust proliferative people, and Pharoah, along with his advisors, fears them. If he knows nothing of Joseph in history, we could presume he doesn’t know his history. *It’s imperative we learn from history.*

The Egyptians force them to build and live in “bedroom or supply cities” Pithom and Rameses so they know where their slave work force is. They worked harshly. Cruelly. Low wages, minimal protection. Yet the Israelites continue to increase and are healthy and robust. Why is this? History and geography reveal

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that the land of Goshen is just east of a tributary of the river Nile delta, where the sedimentary soil is rich. Plentiful crops are grown and their livestock flourishes. Good food, lots of exercise, it seems logical that the population would be healthy. A healthy population proliferates!

How many of us grasp the dehumanizing impact of slavery, which comes in different forms? We've learned a lot from our history books. Sadly, I've personally witnessed the dehumanizing effect of it.

Pharoah in his fear causes chaos, turns violent and orders infanticide of male children born of Jewish women. Midwives Shiphrah and Puah are instructed to throw these babies into the convenient Nile. Slow moving water through several channels of the delta, along with plenty of wildlife like crocodiles and hippopotami. We must conclude that the evidence of Pharoah's violence and cruelty would quickly disappear.

Shiphrah and Puah are "unsung heroes the story." They demonstrate and perform truly exceptional acts of faith. They defied Pharoah's infanticide orders "because they feared God!" In other words, they ***are in awe of and respect*** God. They put their own lives at risk by not obeying Pharoah – they ***believed in God and they took their directions from God***. Their ***minds were transformed***. They saved the children and they themselves were rewarded by God with families of their own. It doesn't get much better than that does it.

Fear of the Lord doesn't mean fear, or scared as we might think it does in modern English. Fear of the Lord is rooted in the word "yirah", which correctly means they had a profound sense of awe, reverence and deep respect, lovingly submitting to God's majesty and holiness. "Yirah" is often used in the context

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of seeking wisdom and understanding from God. This links to Proverbs 9:10a “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...”¹ Translated into our current English: “The respect and awe of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...”

N.T. Wright addresses “fear of the Lord.” We were made to know, worship, love, and serve the creator God. This demands humility: a willingness to let God be God, to celebrate and honor him as such, acknowledging his power over the world.¹

What about the baby? At 3 months old, the mother couldn’t hide him from the authorities anymore. Weaving a suitable waterproof basket, the child was floated off in the Nile, watched by his sister. Remember there are crocodiles and hippopotami in the water. The water current was gentle because of the flat landscape of the Nile river delta region. At least the child might have a chance of survival. Pharoah’s daughter came down to bathe in the area where the baby’s basket was stuck in the reeds. Now hold on a minute. Was this by chance? I doubt it. My hypothesis is that the mother and her daughter had done their reconnaissance. They knew where Pharoah’s daughter bathed regularly. They knew she would be accompanied by her servants. They developed their plan of action. This really increased the chance of the baby being discovered. One of the maids collected the basket from the river. How about the fact that when she saw the crying baby, the Princess’ heart simply melted and she picked him up.

What would any of us do with a crying baby? Our natural compassion and humanity is to comfort a child. Feed it. Provide safety. The Princess did this. She simply personified her love and humanity. It was rather convenient that the baby’s sister was nearby, watching and then offered to find a wet nurse for the child, who just happens to be the child’s mother. It seems entirely possible this whole event was well planned and implemented. And it worked. Little did the Princess know, she had inadvertently saved Israel!!

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God works in strong and mysterious ways, even under oppressive governments. The Israelites in Egypt were certainly living under a brutally violent and oppressive government.

Paul's letter to the Romans reminds us that God is working in the lives of all people. He doesn't do this independently of our efforts, but through sharing of God's word across the boundaries of nations, race and ethnicity.

In today's Gospel, when Jesus asks his disciples, "who do you say that I am?" He asked this while in Caesarea Philippi, which is deep in imperial Roman territory! Paul tells us to transform our minds. People who've renewed their minds may discern the will of God, possibly inherently understanding what is good, acceptable and perfect. Imperial culture uses power to use others for the sake of the Empire. "The culture of Christ is about making sacrifice of self, as Jesus did, so as to make all of our lives an act of self-sacrificial worship." However, Paul cautions us not to think of ourselves more highly than we should., "but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." ²

Even Peter didn't quite get it. Jesus talked of laying down his life. Peter pushed back and Jesus rebuked him for it. In short, the transforming of our minds is a constant makeover, and it is tough to do. We are likely to stumble and revert to earlier thinking. The toughest challenge for us is to admit when we stumble and have the strength to persevere with our makeover.

There's no way of us ever truly understanding the power of God.

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Paul encourages us to offer ourselves, renew and transform our minds and remain humble and connected with each other, using our gifts to God's service.

Fr. Steve Pankey summarized this Christ Episcopal Church in Bowling Green "we who are ready, willing, and to varying degrees able, will support one another in the ministry of what lays ahead. May God bless us with new risks, new opportunities to love and new blessings today and always. May the love of God that we experience here as a group of brothers and sisters in Christ together...be **blessed** with new risks, new opportunities and new blessings every day, today and always, **working to be transformed in our minds and our attitudes.**"³

We have the gifts to make community life happen. God gives them to us. However, its up to us to put into practice. Let His Grace shape the lives we live in our community. No one can experience Christ for us. It's a personal choice for us to make.

God's power is inviting, not overpowering. God's call rests quietly in our hearts as an enduring invitation which we are completely free to ignore or accept. His power works through long-term transformation rather than immediate domination.⁴

Our challenge is this is completely counterintuitive in our current living in an "instant gratification, instant fix" environment.

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When Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you think I am?” he was addressing the group with him. You could be either one person or all of us. What if Jesus were to appear to us here, right now and asks us collectively “Who do you say that I am?” how comfortable or uncomfortable would we feel? Would we be able to look at him? Could we answer him? Would we be looking around, squirming in our seats, shuffling our feet?

My deep, earnest prayer is that each one of us, through our faith, have the courage to look into his eyes and humbly acknowledge “My Lord and My God!”

Amen

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