

Sermon and Readings 13th Sunday After Pentecost 23 August 2026

Exodus 1.8–2.10

⁸ Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹ He said to his people, 'Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. ¹⁰ Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.' ¹¹ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labour. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. ¹³ The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, ¹⁴ and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labour. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them. ¹⁵ The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ¹⁶ 'When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.' ¹⁷ But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. ¹⁸ So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, 'Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?' ¹⁹ The midwives said to Pharaoh, 'Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.' ²⁰ So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. ²² Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, 'Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.' ¹ Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. ² The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. ³ When she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. ⁵ The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. ⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. 'This must be one of the Hebrews' children,' she said. ⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I

go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?’⁸ Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, ‘Yes.’ So the girl went and called the child’s mother.⁹ Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, ‘Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.’ So the woman took the child and nursed it.¹⁰ When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, ‘because’, she said, ‘I drew him out of the water.’

Psalm 124

¹ If the Lord had not been on our side, now may Israel say:
if the Lord had not been on our side, when our enemies rose against us,
² Then they would have swallowed us alive:
when their anger was kindled against us.
³ Then the waters would have overwhelmed us, and the torrent gone over us:
the raging waters would have gone clean over us.
⁴ But praised be the Lord:
who has not given us as a prey to their teeth.
⁵ We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler:
the snare is broken, and we have gone free.
⁶ Our help is in the name of the Lord:
who has made heaven and earth.

Romans 12.1–8

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. ³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶ We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸ the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Matthew 16.13–20

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ ¹⁴ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ ¹⁵ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ 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. 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. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ ²⁰ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Sermon

Every part of the story matters.

Every piece of the puzzle. Every thread in the narrative. Every member of the body. And there are certainly plenty of pieces in today’s reading from Exodus.

There is slavery. A frightened and jealous Pharaoh. The terrible order to kill children. Two courageous midwives. A desperate mother. A baby hidden away. A basket covered with tar. A sister watching from the riverbank. A princess who shows compassion. It has all the ingredients of an epic story.

Yet all these characters, choices and events point us towards one central truth: **God saves.** Consider the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah. Pharaoh commands them to kill the Hebrew boys at birth. They have every reason to be terrified. Pharaoh possesses enormous power. He can threaten them, punish them, perhaps even kill them. But Exodus tells us that the midwives feared God.

In the Old Testament, the “fear of God” is not simply about being frightened of God. It is about recognising God's authority, trusting God's goodness, and allowing that relationship to shape the way we live. The midwives face a choice between obedience to Pharaoh and obedience to God. And they choose God.

Their actions might appear small in the great sweep of history. They do not overthrow Pharaoh. They do not organise a rebellion. They do not lead Israel out of Egypt. They simply refuse to take part in evil. Yet that act of courage changes everything. Because one of the children who survives is Moses. The child who should have died eventually becomes the man through whom God leads Israel out of slavery. And the irony is wonderful. Pharaoh tries to destroy Israel's children through the waters of the Nile, but eventually Pharaoh's own power will be destroyed in the waters of the Red Sea. God is already at work.

Then there is Moses' mother. She hides her child for as long as she can. When she can hide him no longer, she places him in a basket and sets him among the reeds. There is his sister, watching from a distance. There is Pharaoh's daughter, who looks into the basket and does not see an enemy. She sees a crying child and has compassion. And there is the basket itself. The Hebrew word used for Moses' basket is the same word used for Noah's ark. Once again, God uses a small vessel floating upon dangerous waters to carry life away from death. Every part of the story matters. Every person plays a part. Yet none of them can see the whole picture.

Moses' mother does not know what will happen when she places that basket among the reeds. His sister does not know what she will discover as she watches. Pharaoh's daughter does not know that the child she rescues will one day confront Pharaoh himself. They simply act faithfully in the moment before them. And perhaps that is something we need to hear. **We are not called to carry the whole story.** We are not called to save the world. We are called to be faithful in the part God has given us.

Paul says something very similar in our reading from Romans.

The Church is like a body. A body does not have one member but many. Each member has different gifts. Each has a different purpose. Each is needed. Some are hands. Some are feet. Some are eyes. Some are ears. And someone has to be the little toe! It may not seem particularly important—until you hurt it and suddenly discover how much you need it. We are not all called to do the same thing. We are not all called to preach. We are not all called to lead. We are not all called to stand before Pharaoh. Some ministries are visible. Others are almost completely hidden. But every faithful act matters.

The mistake comes when we begin believing that everything depends upon us. It doesn't. The Church has only one Saviour, and it isn't us. **Christ is the Saviour.** Our calling is to be faithful where God has placed us, using the gifts God has given us. And that brings us to the Gospel. Jesus asks his disciples: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They give him several answers. John the Baptist... Elijah... Jeremiah... One of the prophets... All important people. All important parts of God's story. But then Jesus makes the question personal: *"But who do you say that I am?"* Peter answers: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." That question remains at the heart of Christian faith. *Who do you say Jesus is?* Not simply, "What does the Church say?" Not simply, "What did my parents teach me?" Not simply, "What does the creed say?" Those things matter enormously. They shape us and teach us. But eventually the question reaches each one of us: **Who do you say that Jesus is?** Peter says, "You are the Messiah." Yet Peter still has much to learn about what that means. He will discover that being Messiah does not mean Jesus will remove every difficulty or immediately defeat every enemy. The story of salvation will lead Jesus towards Jerusalem. Towards suffering. Towards the cross. And ultimately towards resurrection. Peter can see only one small piece of the story. Just like the midwives. Just like Moses' mother. Just like the sister standing beside the Nile. And just like us. We cannot see the whole story either.

We live in a world that can still feel very much like the world of Exodus—a world containing fear, oppression, violence and injustice. But it is also a world filled with courage, compassion, faithfulness and unexpected grace. And God is still at work. Sometimes we are tempted to believe that we must fix everything. At other times we are tempted to give up because the problems seem too large.

Scripture offers us another way. Do your part...Use your gifts...Stand against evil when it confronts you...Show compassion when someone is placed before you... Speak when you need to speak... Watch and wait when that is your calling. Build the basket...Protect the child...Stand beside the river...Be the hand... Be the foot... Be the very important little toe. Because every part matters.

We may never part the Red Sea...We may never stand before Pharaoh. We may never be called the rock upon which Christ builds his Church. But we might be

the parent who makes sacrifices for a child. We might be the person who chooses what is right when doing so carries a cost. We might notice someone whom everyone else has overlooked. We might offer a word of encouragement at exactly the right moment. We might pray faithfully when nobody else knows we are praying. We might simply do the small thing God has placed before us today. And through all those seemingly ordinary acts, God continues to weave the great story of salvation. We do not need to know the whole story. We do not need to control the outcome. We simply need the courage to be faithful with the part we have been given. Because salvation belongs to God. Christ alone saves...Christ alone leads us from bondage into freedom...Christ alone carries the weight of redemption. Every part of the story matters. Every member of the body matters. Every faithful act matters. And whatever part we are given to play, we can trust the One who holds the whole story.

Our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. Amen.