



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

(920)261-2570

A Stephen Ministry Congregation

www.goodshepherdwi.org

Sixth Sunday After Epiphany

February 12, 2017

“More Than a Problem of Language”

(Exodus 1:8-22)

Rev. David K. Groth

“Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, ‘Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them . . .’ (Ex. 1:8-10).

Collect of the Day: O Lord, graciously hear the prayers of Your people that we who justly suffer the consequence of our sin may be mercifully delivered by Your goodness to the glory of Your name; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

In our text, we see Israel emerging as a people. You recall how Joseph brought Jacob and the rest of his family down to Egypt, rescuing them from famine. They prosper there in Egypt. Verse 5 of our text says, “The descendents of Jacob were seventy persons.” But then in verse 7 we read: “The people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that [Egypt] was filled with them.”

Not everyone in Egypt is happy about this. There arose a new Pharaoh who knew nothing of Joseph. And he said to his people, “Behold, there are way too many of them. If war breaks out, they’ll probably join our enemies and fight against us.” Notice the familiar fear mongering. “They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.” So the Egyptians started oppressing the people of Israel, and with time it all eventually leads to slavery. Verse 12, “But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel.”

So the king of Egypt hatches a new plan to control the growth of this population. Verse 15, “He said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ‘When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them giving birth, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.’” Ancient empires could be brutal like that. With just a word from the king or Pharaoh, they could kill or enslave thousands.

It should not be difficult to figure out that killing Hebrew babies was wrong, that Pharaoh did a wicked thing, and those who fulfilled the order did great wickedness as

well. So the real heroes in this account are the Hebrew midwives, represented by Shiprah and Puah, two obscure women who frustrate a powerful ruler. They were given a choice between obeying God or obeying man. And they chose to obey God.

Notice, two representative lowly Hebrew midwives are named in the text, whereas the Egyptian pharaoh, the most powerful man in that part of the world, remains unnamed. God's Word is lifting up "those of humble estate" and bringing down "the mighty" (Lk. 1:52).

In ancient Egypt, all it required was an order from Pharaoh and countless babies were killed. In our country, it came down to a vote of nine men in 1973, and since then over 58 million babies have been killed.

This is hard to face. We all want to look away, right. We don't even want to think about that number. But God would not have us ignore this reality. God would not have his people become complacent while babies are thrown into the Nile then or while babies are aborted today. God keeps calling us to action, to mercy, to compassion. Where are the midwives of Israel? Where are those of God's people today who will speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves? Where are those who will obey God rather than man?

In ancient Egypt, the Nile River was regarded as the source of life for Egypt, bringing fertility to an otherwise arid desert land. But Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew babies thrown into the Nile River, turning that source of life into an agent of death. Similarly, today, in our country, physicians have long been regarded as protectors and guardians of life. "First, do no harm" has been the code. But *Roe v. Wade* and other laws have turned many of them into agents of death, on the front and back ends of life.

Those involved with abortion have been horribly deceived and misled. For example, they think because a child is so small days after conception, and doesn't even look like a child, that abortion is ok. But that's precisely what a child is supposed to look like just after conception. That's

what you and I looked like.

I always find that a sermon on this topic is among the most difficult to write, and to preach. It's not because I don't know what I believe on this topic or why. No, I believe abortion is one of the greatest evils of our time. But I also know some of you have had abortions and have confessed your sin and received God's full forgiveness. So I don't want to hurt you or reopen old wounds with God's Law. I don't want you to think God is still holding that club over your head, because he's not. He loves you and has forgiven you fully.

But remaining silent isn't an option, because there are others in this room who probably think abortion is a matter of private choice. Moreover the resolve of many Christians against abortion has been softened by time, by the commonness of the procedure, and by the high-sounding rhetoric of the day, which talks vaguely of women's health issues, rather than the life of a child that hangs in the balance. And there are always some who think abortion is just a political opinion, not a matter of faith. By the way, there's no political party that aligns itself even tolerably with the Christian faith. So don't let your loyalty to a political party [either one] change what you believe on the basis of God's Word. God's Word must remain foremost. God's Word alone, and not the words of man, determines what we believe and practice.

Journalist Jonah Goldberg has noticed that whenever there's an unplanned pregnancy in the T.V. sitcoms, dutifully, the baby is referred to as an "it." But as soon as Rachel, for example, in the T.V. series "Friends" chooses to keep it, the "it" magically stops being an "it" and becomes a baby. But it's always a baby, and I think deep down we know this. No pregnant mother will say, "The fetus just kicked me." And no father will put is ear up to his wife's tummy and speak of a belly full of "uterine contents." No, it's always a baby. Can't you see this is more than a problem of language? Just using the approved language isn't going to change the nature of abortion or what it does.

Similarly, the International Planned Parenthood Federation cautions activists to avoid using the “p” word, the word person because they believe it’s not a person with full rights until it’s born. Or, as Sen. Barbara Boxer even suggested, it’s not a person until you bring it home from the hospital. Planned Parenthood advises activists to not even use the word abortion. If you must, talk about “terminating a pregnancy” instead, or avoid it altogether and talk instead about “women’s health issues.” But again, this is more than a problem of language. Lives hang in the balance.

Last year, the White House was lobbying for funds for Zika research. The White House press secretary said, “I think Congress is interested in making sure that pregnant women and unborn children in this country can be properly protected.” Of course we want to protect them from disease carrying mosquitoes. But he used the language “unborn children” which made many in certain camps wince, because that’s not approved language. They believe there is no such thing as an unborn child. It’s just a fetus until it’s born, and not a person or a child or a he or a she. Today if parents desire to keep the child it’s a baby. If they don’t desire to keep the child, it’s only a fetus or an “it.” So it’s based on emotions, right? And the problem is emotion is not a good foundation for establishing law. In the past, emotion led lots of Germans to conclude Jews weren’t real persons either. And in our own country, emotion led many to believe African Americans weren’t really persons with full rights. If they’re not persons, you can buy them, sell them, experiment on them, put them to death, all things which have been happening with unborn children. It’s not logic that enables these tragedies. And it’s not science. It’s not moral reasoning that enabled these tragedies. It’s emotions, emotions like fear, greed, shame and despair.

When law is based on emotion, it becomes irrational and inconsistent. Under federal law, if someone intentionally or accidentally kills a pregnant woman, he can be charged with two homicides. And yet that same woman can go to a clinic and have the baby aborted and it’s all perfectly

legal. That's not rational.

We must help people understand. Not only are the lives of babies at risk, but also the mothers and fathers and even the doctors. Individuals (and even cultures) cannot engage in evil like this and not be affected by it. You cannot shake hands with the devil and just walk away. When you participate in evil, it changes you. It wounds you. It leaves behind scars.

And this is very important. Not only does evil change a person, but so does grace. Evil leaves a mark on us, there's no doubt. But God leaves a mark on us too! "Receive the sign of the cross both upon your forehead and upon your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified." That is, you've baptized into His name, and that has changed you forever. You are and will remain God's beloved child.

Earlier in the service you confessed your sin and received absolution, and that changes you too. In John chapter 20, "The Lord Jesus breathed on his disciples and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven'" (vv. 22-23).

You've had (will have) the redeeming body and blood of Jesus put into your mouth, and that changes you too. No stain of sin can stand up to his blood which washes all of it away. "Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool" (Is. 1:18).

So don't talk yourself out of forgiveness for any sin. And don't give yourselves over to hatred and rage. We who have been given so much by grace, cannot hold other sinners in derision or contempt. We who have been given so much by grace, cannot think of abortion providers as something less than human, for then we would be making the same mistake they make by viewing an unborn child as something less than human. Abortion providers, abortion rights advocates, and those who have had abortions have been deceived, for sure, by the father of all lies. . . but they are

people for whom Jesus also died on the cross, people whom God loves in spite of their sin.

I think sometimes people will close their minds to the Gospel because if they are to receive God's forgiveness, they must first acknowledge their sin, and for some who have had an abortion or counseled someone else to have an abortion, that's unthinkable. They'd have to acknowledge they were responsible for the death of a child, and how could they ever live with themselves? So it's easier for them to keep clinging to the lie that it wasn't really a child rather than acknowledging the truth of what they did. But let me just remind you that God can forgive anyone of any sin, freely, fully, completely and perfectly, without a shred of lingering ill will. It's far better for us to acknowledge and confess our sin and let him take it way than clinging to untruth.

David, whose conscience was tortured by all the innocent blood on his hands, wrote this: "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long . . ." That's what sin does when we hold on to it. It eats away at us. It feeds on us. Over time it has a way of killing us. David continues: "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord' – and you forgave the guilt of my sin" (Ps. 32:3,5). "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit" (vv. 1-2). Don't deceive yourselves with a shallow substitution of recommended words, because they don't hold up to God's Word or to logic or science or moral reasoning. Don't deceive yourself; just hand over that sin to a merciful God who loves to forgive and save his people.

No stain of sin can stand up to his forgiveness. Our sin, yours and mine, though as black as tar, in Christ Jesus they become as white as fresh snow cover on a cloudless day. Amen.

