



# The Trinity Pulpit



## A Mother's Story Exodus 2:1-10

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*Reader's Digest* tells of two seminary students who decided to go door-to-door sharing their faith. At one house they walked through a gauntlet of screaming children and barking dogs; a tired mother opened the door. "We would like to tell you how to obtain eternal life," they said. She hesitated, looked around for a moment, then she replied, "Thank you, but no thanks. I don't believe that I could stand it!"<sup>1</sup>

Parenting! It is one of the hardest roles we will ever undertake; it can also be one of the most rewarding roles we will ever have. As parents and grandparents, sometimes we might feel that we are taken for granted. We might be reminded that yes, we have been given Father's Day and Mother's Day, but did you know that things like egg salad, pancakes, and carpenter bees each get a week of the year? If that is not bad enough, peanut butter, chickens, and oatmeal all get one month. Yet, we know that as parents and adults who influence children, we have been given a sacred and important task.

Sometimes we approach our parenting like that of Ian Frazier who wrote the "Lamentations of a Father" as he created the Old Testament rules for parents.

### Old Testament Parenting: Laws of Forbidden Places

*Of the beasts of the field, and of the fishes of the sea, and of all foods that are acceptable, in my sight you may eat, but not in the living room. Of the hoofed animals, broiled or ground into burgers, you may eat, but not in the living room. Of the cloven-hoofed animal, plain or with cheese, you may eat, but not in the living room. Of the cereal grains, of the corn and of the wheat and of the oats, and of all the cereals that are of bright color and unknown provenance you may eat, but not in the living room. Of quiescently frozen desserts and of all frozen after-meal treats you may eat, but absolutely not in the living room.*

*Of the juices and other beverages, yea, even of those in sippy-cups, you may drink, but not in the living room; neither may you carry such therein. Indeed, when you reach the place where the living-room carpet begins, of any food or beverage there, you may not eat, neither may you drink. But if you are sick, and are lying down and watching something, then may you eat in the living room.*

### Laws When at Table

*And if you are seated in your highchair, or in a chair such as a greater person might use, keep your legs and feet below you, as it were. Neither raise up your knees, nor place your feet upon the table, for that is an abomination unto me. Yea, even when you have an interesting bandage to show, your feet upon the table are an abomination, and worthy of rebuke.*

*Drink your milk as it is given you, neither use on it any utensils, nor fork, nor knife, nor spoon, for that is not what they are for; if you will dip your blocks in the milk, and lick it off, you shall be sent away.*

*When you have drunk, let the empty cup then remaining upon the table, and do not bite it upon its edge and by your teeth hold it to your face in order to make noises in it sounding like a duck: for you shall be sent away.*

*When you chew your food, keep your mouth closed until you have swallowed, and do not open it to show your brother or your sister what is within; I say to you, do not do so, even if your brother or your sister hath done the same to you.*

*Eat your food only; do not eat that which is not food; neither seize the table between your jaws, nor use the raiment of the table*

to wipe your lips. I say again to you, do not touch it, but leave it as it is.

*And though your stick of carrot does indeed resemble a marker, draw not with it upon the table, even in pretend, for we do not do that, that is why. And though the pieces of broccoli are very like small trees, do not stand them upright to make a forest, because we do not do that, that is why.*

*Sit just as I have told you, and do not lean to one side or the other, nor slide down until you are nearly slid away. Heed me; for if you sit like that, your hair will go into the syrup. And now behold, even as I have said, it has come to pass.*

#### Laws Pertaining to Dessert

*For we judge between the plate that is unclean and the plate that is clean, saying first, if the plate is clean, then you shall have dessert.*

*But of the unclean plate, the laws are these: If you have eaten most of your meat, and two bites of your peas with each bite consisting of not less than three peas each, or in total six peas, eaten where I can see, and you have also eaten enough of your potatoes to fill two forks, both forkfuls eaten where I can see, then you shall have dessert.*

*But if you eat a lesser number of peas, and yet you eat the potatoes, still you shall not have dessert; and if you eat the peas, yet leave the potatoes uneaten, you shall not have dessert, no, not even a small portion thereof.*

*And if you try to deceive by moving the potatoes or peas around with a fork, that it may appear you have eaten what you have not, you will fall into iniquity. And I will know, and you shall have no dessert.*

#### On Screaming

*Do not scream; for it is as if you scream all the time. If you are given a plate on which two foods you do not wish to touch each other are touching each other, your voice rises up even to the ceiling, while you point to the offense with the finger of your right hand; but I say to you, scream not, only remonstrate gently with the server, that the server may correct the fault.*

*Likewise if you receive a portion of fish from which every piece of herbal seasoning has not been scraped off, and the herbal seasoning is loathsome to you and steeped in vileness, again I say, refrain from screaming. Though the vileness overwhelm you, and cause you a faint unto death, make not that*

*sound from within your throat, neither cover your face, nor press your fingers to your nose. For even I have made the fish as it should be; behold, I eat it myself, ye shall not surely die.<sup>2</sup>*

In our text this morning, we find the story of Moses' birth and the actions his mother took to enable him not only to survive but to thrive and to be used by God as God's chosen deliverer. In this mother's story we find our roles as parents, grandparents and adults in this community of faith. Let's look at our story and discover what we can offer our children.

First, we must give our children protection. In the beginning of Exodus, we are told that a king came into power who did not know Joseph, after all that Joseph had done to save Egypt during the famine. Now Joseph's decedents were multiplying, so the new Pharaoh was trying to find some way to control the growing immigrant population. First, he decided to oppress them with work: he brought them under his control to build his cities and projects; he made their work very difficult, but still the Israelites multiplied. Pharaoh became afraid that such a large number of immigrants would mean that they would fight with the enemies of Egypt against the Egyptians. They were a terroristic threat from within. Pharaoh called the Hebrew midwives to himself and told them that when they went to help the Israelite women with births, they were to kill any boys, yet let the girls live. But the midwives feared the Lord and would not obey Pharaoh. When Pharaoh heard that the boys were not being killed, he again summoned the midwives. The midwives told Pharaoh that they were unable to kill the boys because, unlike the Egyptian women, the Hebrew women were real women and they gave birth quickly. Therefore, the children were born before the midwives could get there. Pharaoh then took matters into his own hands and declared genocide in regards to the Hebrew births – every boy was to be thrown into the Nile River, but the girls were to live.

That is our setting when Moses was born to his parents in Exodus 2. Because Moses' parents wanted to protect him, they hid him for three months. The word for hiding is the word for burying a treasure. The picture is of caring for and protecting something of great worth. One of the first roles of a parent is to provide protection, for we know that our children are treasures to be protected. Protection by parents is really the most basic instinct of any animal. In the wild, the protecting act of mothers from those who would prey upon their offspring is a basic instinct.

So as parents, our first role is protection. In our current culture we go to extremes to protect our children from physical harm. How things have changed. If you were

like me, you grew up drinking water from a hose, not a bottle. You took trips lying in the back of the car up against the back window. Your home and everywhere else was filled with secondhand smoke. Your rooms were painted with lead paint and your school was filled with asbestos. Now many of you are saying to yourself, "That explains a lot." But today we are very diligent in physical protection. We have car seats, safety caps on medicine, helmets for bike riding, and we walk our children to and from school. We test everything we feed them and give them, which is as it should be. Physical protection of our children is an important role. To be sure, there are some scary things in our world. There are accidents and there are people who would cause our children harm, so we must be diligent in protecting our children. Jochebed, Moses' mother, did what anyone would do – she hid their child from those who would cause him harm.

Yet there is more than just physical harm which threatens our children, there is also emotional and spiritual harm. There are certain things a child should not have to experience until they are ready and more mature. We must protect their minds and experiences until they are ready for such experiences. We live in a culture that has extended adolescence on each end. Our children have to experience mature language, situations, and emotions before they are ready; adolescence is beginning much too early in our culture. In the same way, experts are telling us that adolescence is being extended to the age of 25 in many cases. In other words, children are growing up too quickly but not into adults quick enough. One of the problems is that we do not understand our role of protection for our children when they are young. Besides emotional there must also be spiritual protection. We are blessed to have Rev. Karen Metcalf and Mrs. Melanie Ward here at Trinity, because they understand the process of salvation for children. Children must not be hurried in this process and yet not be denied this important process. Our ministry understands the process of learning and processing for children, so that when they come to faith, they have made a decision that they are able to make not only spiritually but emotionally and intellectually.

And protection does not stop when they are young. As the adult, there are times that we have to utter that one horrible word which causes conflict and ill feelings but is necessary. That word is "No!" Robin likes to call it "being the roadblock." There are times when a parent

notices a child going down the wrong road and the only option you have, if you love your child, is to stand in their way. Protection is the first task of parenting, but protection cannot continue for a lifetime; it must give way to preparation.

The second act of Moses' mother was preparation. When she could no longer protect him because he was growing, she took a papyrus basket and covered it with pitch and created a safe ark for her child. She placed the boy Moses into the small ark and set him along the bank amongst the reeds. It was there that Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe and Moses was discovered. Jochebed sent Moses' sister Miriam to continue to watch over him; she was still seeking to protect him while simultaneously making the transition to preparation. When the slave girl of Pharaoh's daughter saw the small ark, she brought it to her mistress. Pharaoh's daughter felt compassion for the baby and took it to be her own. However, before Moses would go to live in the palace, he would be nursed and reared for a small time by his own mother as she prepared him for his new life as an Egyptian. This whole process was a move from protection to preparation.

What is the role of preparation for parents? Our goal is to place our children in a place and gift them with what they need, so as to open their lives to the possibilities of God. That is what Jochebed did. She placed him in that small ark and set him in a place where what God could do became a possibility.

We have a role to play in preparation. Of course, there is academic preparation as well as preparation in practical matters of living. One of the interesting things that have occurred in our recent recession is the renewed interest in teaching children financial responsibility. For too many generations that responsibility was neglected. Now out of necessity, we are teaching our children the value and responsibility of money. It is one of the up-sides of our current cultural challenge. We must prepare our children in these ways as well as spiritually.

The Bible is clear that it is the responsibility of the parents to write upon the hearts and minds the laws of God. This act is intentional and carries with it a great responsibility. Parents, none of us would ever say that our children should have a choice whether they should learn English or Math or Science. Although they might not use everything they learn in making a living, we value their education. Yet, too many times we view their



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spiritual maturity as a choice they should make. How have we arrived at such a place? We must begin again to value their spiritual maturity as much as we value their intellectual development. Preparation is the second role of the parent. There is a time for protection, but it gives way to preparation.

There is a third gift we can give to our children: community. Our text reminds us that there were four women who were used by God to make sure that Moses not only survived but thrived. Moses' mother played a role but she needed help. The four women mentioned in our text were Moses' mother, Pharaoh's daughter, the slave girl, and Miriam, Moses' sister. How different they were: a Hebrew woman who lived a life in fear and under the oppression of Pharaoh; a woman who was of royalty and had everything and anything at her disposal; a slave girl who had little power; and a sister who had only love for a little brother. All different women and all significant in the story. This story is about God's chosen one – Moses – but it is also about how God uses people to achieve his will in this world and in the lives of those he has chosen.

Every time we have a parent/child dedication we make a vow to be a community that a parent can trust. We make a vow to provide the resources for children in our church; additionally, we vow to be the kinds of people who can help a child grow in faith. Who knows who God is going to use to help these children come to the Lord and grow in faith? He will surely use their parents and grandparents. Moreover, one of you will rock a child in Extended Session and one day, when you tell them that God loves them, it is going to connect and mean something. One day, one of you is going to teach a Sunday school lesson about Jesus and what God did through Him, and it is going to make a child begin to ask those questions of faith. One day, a child is going to go on a youth trip and, as a chaperone, you will model faith and they will be encouraged. It happens little by little and person by person. God still uses people to mold those he has chosen for his purposes. Therefore, parents have the task of protection, preparation, and providing community.

One last thought: parents give a child freedom into the power of God.

Some years ago there was a Prodigal Son cartoon in which a father was going down the road to meet his son. The caption read, "I'll be glad when this boy grows

up; this is the sixth fatted calf." When does one become responsible?

As a parent, there comes a time when we must release our children unto the Lord's care. Moses' mother took her son and put him in a papyrus and pitch basket. The word described here was the word for ark which is the same word that describes what Noah built. Jochebed placed her child in an ark and trusted that God would be her deliverer; He delivered Moses just as he had delivered Noah. Did Jochebed trust Pharaoh's sister or her slave girl? Not really. She trusted God. When she had done all she could in protection and preparation, she released him into God's hands. She trusted God.

There comes a time for release. For many of us this is the hardest moment. For some of us it is a scary moment. For some of us this moment has caused great grief and anxiety. However, this is not about trusting our children; it is about trusting God – trusting the God who cares, loves, and delivers. I want you to know that God is always doing everything He can do, short of violating free will, to bring back the wayward child to Himself. You cannot make an adult child love God. God cannot make anyone love Him in return, but please find peace in knowing that God continues to love them and is at work through the Holy Spirit drawing all of us to Himself. That is the promise of the Bible. We come to a place that protection and preparation gives way to trust, not trust in one another but trust in the God who has previously delivered.

One of the most extensive studies of faith development ever conducted on the American people found that the "who" or "what" that had the most positive influence on religious faith, regardless of age group, sex or denomination, was "my mother."<sup>3</sup>

The role of a parent can never be underestimated. Some of us are in the mode of protection. Some of us are in the years of preparation. Some of us are struggling with that moment of release. In all of these we need our community of faith to walk with us. Protection, preparation, community, and trusting God – that is one mother's story.



<sup>1</sup>Larry Davies, "Turning Points: Moses, Failure and Faith," November 10, 1999.

<sup>2</sup>Ian Frazier, "Lamentations of the Father", *The Atlantic Monthly*, [www.theatlanticmonthly.com/issues/97](http://www.theatlanticmonthly.com/issues/97).

<sup>3</sup>*National and International Religion Report*, 4 (12 March 1990).

