

Now, *this* story is what we call a target-rich environment. So many things going on. Let me draw your attention first to Pharaoh, who is several generations removed from the Pharaoh who had elevated Joseph and allowed his family to migrate in order that they might not die in their native country of starvation. This pharaoh, despite being king of an extremely powerful and wealthy nation, is driven by fear; and when he sees the descendants of Jacob living and working contentedly in Egypt, all he can think about is the possibility that because they are of a different ethnicity, they might ally themselves with an unnamed enemy and turn against Egypt. He may have had information that isn't reported in Exodus, but I can't help but think that if Pharaoh had instead gloated a little about the diversity of Egypt and how immigrants made Egypt stronger, and maybe instituted a "Meet Your Religious Neighbor" open house series, the Bible would be a lot shorter.

BUT he didn't, he was gripped by fear, and so set in motion a cascade of events which ordinary people, not necessarily in coordination with one another, did the best they could with what they had in the moment, and totally thwarted the king of the richest global superpower in the Ancient Near East.

First, he told the Egyptian women who served as midwives to the Hebrews that they should kill the newborn boys. I'm surmising that the midwives were Egyptian because of the story they came up with for Pharaoh: "These Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before we can get there." They're using Pharaoh's own "othering" of the Hebrews to come up with a story he'll believe. They're also probably exploiting his ignorance of the birth process and women's bodies, since it's actually a really implausible story. Egyptian midwives use the little bit of privilege they have as Egyptians to

undermine the Pharaoh's policy.

Next, of course, Moses' mother does the best she can in a bad situation: she keeps her baby for three months and then obeys the letter of Pharaoh's command that Hebrew boys should be thrown into the Nile. She puts her baby boy into the river, but in a waterproofed "ark," the same word as was used for Noah's boat. That is a terrible thing for a parent to have to do, but if she doesn't, he will surely be killed. Her daughter, Moses' sister, probably distraught, goes and watches the little basket, and when Pharaoh's daughter finds the baby and recognizes him as a Hebrew, Miriam takes the opportunity to offer her mother as a wet nurse so that Pharaoh's daughter can adopt him. I have no doubt that Pharaoh's daughter saw through that little ruse, but she chose to act from love rather than from fear. So Moses survives.

The reading fast-forwards to an important event in Moses' adult life, but I want to pause here and just point out how much was accomplished by people using their limited power to its fullest extent. Nobody had a grand plan or strategy for defeating Pharaoh or changing his mind or turning his policies around, but each person did what she could, even if it might be futile. So often I think we want to get all our ducks in a row before we can act, but that may not be possible. This story reminds us that one small act of love and resistance can have consequences down the road that magnify the original act.

So we move to the burning bush scene, and here, I've read, the miracle of the burning bush is that Moses turned aside to see it. God could have come to him in a dream and said, "Moses, Moses," but God chose to disturb the scenery a little bit and see if Moses would be alert and curious enough to notice. He was, so God made his ask, which was *not* small and did

*not* offer great assurances of success, but God had been hearing the cries of the people who really couldn't do anything other than cry out, and someone needed to step up. I am very sympathetic to Moses in this situation, because he's being told to do something difficult and dangerous for which he feels unqualified, and I too would object and try to get out of it; in fact, I've done that very thing many times. God's assurance is not assuring: "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." So Moses doesn't even get the sign that God is with him until his job is completed. He has to just go ahead, step out into the unknown.

One day a couple weeks ago before the climate summit, I saw a photo of Greta Thunberg last November. She was sitting on the ground outside the Swedish Parliament building clad in a yellow rain jacket, with her trademark serious face and a sign reading (in Swedish), "Strike for Climate." <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2018/11/27/im-striking-school-protest-inaction-climate-change-you-should-too> She told a reporter, "I have Aspergers syndrome so, for me, most things are black or white. I look at the people in power and wonder how they have made things so complicated. I hear people saying that climate change is an existential threat, yet I watch as people carry on like nothing is happening. We can no longer save the world by playing by the rules because the rules have to be changed."

This story is not over yet, so it's inappropriate to celebrate as if one Swedish teenager's amazing activism had saved the world. It hasn't, yet. And in fact, I really resonate with something she said more recently, about how adults shouldn't make a big deal about how great kids are as they try to change policy because adults have even more agency and ought to get down to business instead of lionizing her. But if we take her at her word, and if we take the

stories from Exodus seriously, we should recognize that doing what we can at the moment is not only all we *can* do but absolutely what we *must* do. Thank God Greta didn't take herself out of the equation because she has Asperger's and isn't neuronormal, or because she's just a kid, or because she doesn't know anybody in power. If we are able to contain climate damage and reverse our dependence on fuels that destroy the planet, it will be very much due to her stepping up.

[Sara's project]

All we have to do is what we can do, and trust that there will be others to pick up what we cannot. That's a big ask, and yet also a very reasonable one. "Our deepest fear [remember?] is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." God would not call us if God didn't think we were up to it. We are!

God of deliverance, you called Moses to be your hands, feet, and voice in a troubled world. Allow us also to work, walk, and speak your word in a troubled world. Amen.

