

August 23, 2020  
The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost—Proper 16—Year A  
The Rev. Keri T. Aubert  
St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven, CT

[Morning Prayer]  
Psalm 124  
Exodus 1:8-2:10  
Matthew 16:13-20

Today, as last Sunday, I'd like to turn the bulk of the sermon time over to you all. Again, I'll offer a few thoughts and then try to be quiet.

Today's Hebrew Scripture passage gives us the beginning of Exodus. To recap, the patriarch Jacob's son Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. Joseph saved Egypt from widespread famine, and thereby found favor with Pharaoh. Joseph saved his family of origin—that is, Jacob and Jacob's descendants—the Israelites—from the same famine by bringing them to Egypt. Now, generations have passed, and the Israelites have thrived. The current Pharaoh perceives their numbers as a threat and forces them into indenture.

Enter Shiphrah and Puah, Hebrew midwives. Pharaoh orders them to kill the Hebrew baby boys, but instead they commit stealthy civil disobedience. Pharaoh then sets all Egyptians to the task of genocide. One woman does what it takes to save her son. In this, she is aided by her daughter, and by Pharaoh's daughter. We won't find so many women at one time in a Bible story until Jesus' empty tomb. Of course the boy set upon and then pulled from the water is Moses, who will grow up to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and to the Promised Land. Moses will wall through the Red Sea, but he won't cross the River Jordan.

Moving to the New Testament, we heard what is sometimes called “the Confession of Peter.” Responding to the question Jesus poses to the disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter replies, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”<sup>1</sup>

The Jews of that time looked for God to send them another Moses, a new Messiah to save them from a different form of indenture under the Romans. The followers of Jesus came to understand Jesus to be that Messiah and more. Not just sent by God, but also God Godself, Jesus would bring salvation to the Jews and to the Gentiles and even to all of the created order. Jesus' earthly life would not encompass all that.

Our *Book of Common Prayer* includes liturgies for the ordinations. Right at the beginning of the service, the soon-to-be bishop, priest, or deacon must say these words: “I solemnly declare that I believe the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation.” The liturgy includes some other promises, but that is the only required statement of belief. “I solemnly declare that I believe the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation.”

When it comes to salvation, we talk about the Kingdom of God being “already but not yet”: it is here now, if not in its ultimate fullness. This week I’ve been thinking about salvation and time—that is, salvation *now* and salvation *ultimate*. Some Christians focus so much on the *ultimate* that they neglect the *now*. Conversely, others focus so much on the *now* that they neglect the *ultimate*. If anything, that second category is probably where I fit in. It’s risky, though, because the *hope* of the *ultimate* is what fuels the *now*. In the Gospels, Jesus is concerned with *both*. In the best of our tradition, Christians are concerned with *both*. Maybe life in a pandemic is an especially good time to remember both the *now* and the *ultimate*, and to ponder their interplay. Maybe that’s how we find answers to the question that Jesus asks each of us: “Who do you say that I am?”

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 16:16, NRSV.