

Making a Difference Now: The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, ‘When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.’ The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. **Exodus 1:15–17**

We can all think of people in the past who have taken a stand against evil and injustice, and celebrate their stories from William Wilberforce, Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill to Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. But, they never arrive there alone. This is no truer than in the story of Moses, the leader whose calling by God to speak truth to power has inspired Christian movements for liberation throughout history.

Moses is born at a time of infanticide. Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, seeks to control the Hebrew immigrant population by killing all male babies. Under this bloodthirsty regime, the midwives receive a command: to kill the baby boys. But instead of obeying, they resisted the reign of evil that would be enacted through their hands. Their resistance protected the lives of many Hebrew sons – one of whom grew up to become Moses, the liberator of his people.

These Hebrew women are not the people we might think of when we consider what it means to change the world. We are led to believe that it is only by holding positions of power in politics or institutions or like Bill Gates commanding huge budgets that we can really make a difference. But these women were able to have an impact right where they were, in acts of resistance which shaped an entire generation. The time did come for the historic acts which we can read about in the subsequent chapters of Exodus, but it all begins in a tent, with one woman giving birth, and her midwives refusing to comply with the demands of an evil regime.

We live in a world filled with agendas of the powerful that undermine the good intentions of God for His creation. Aid agencies warn of more deaths from starvation than from Covid-19 this year whilst world leaders jostle for increased power and profitable control of key vaccines and equipment. Many young and poor will suffer whilst most of the rich and the privileged will remain rich and privileged. The task of resistance and making a difference for the vulnerable lies with all of us, whether we are the ones to stand in the place of power, the ones who have a role to play in someone else’s organisation, or in the simple relationships of family, friends and neighbours

At our own time in history, there are groups of people who, like those babies, are vulnerable and threatened with oppression, hunger and exploitation. In our own circle, there are people whose futures are at stake because of the choices and agendas of those more powerful than them. May each of us, in our own small choices and larger decisions, act with the courage of these midwives, to resist and protect those unable to defend themselves. Jesus sent His followers into the world to change lives through God’s power and love – “mission” not mere “maintenance”. **Neither** as part of Christ’s Church **nor** as individual neighbours and citizens, may we be content *to get back to normal*. Instead, let us learn to listen to what God has been - and is - teaching and showing us here and now; let us care for each other and make a difference for good - for Christ’s sake.

The Spirit of Fruitiness: “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*” Galatians 5:22-25

In John 15, Jesus was giving His final key instructions to His friends, fully aware Himself that before the next 24 hours were out, He would have been put to death by crucifixion on a Roman cross. So He told them, “*Be held in My love and put your roots down in Me. I want My love in You to bear fruit – to be evidenced in your lives. And I promise to give all who trust in me, God’s Spirit - the presence and power of God.*” When God’s Holy Spirit makes Himself at home within us, our lives change. Paul calls this ‘*the fruit of the Spirit*’.

Fruit is a great image. The fruit of the Spirit isn’t something we stick onto the outside of our lives, like baubles on a Christmas tree. Rather, it flows out from us, as we soak up the nutrients of God’s word and His holy presence. We cannot force out this spiritual fruit by tapping into our inner resources or by trying harder. This really is about God changing us, as we ‘*keep in step with the Spirit*’.

Healthy fruit is a sign of a healthy tree, and it shares its harvest with the surrounding ecosystem: birds, insects, Homo sapiens, and even our mortal enemies, wasps... Paul had earlier written in his letter to the Christians in Galatia about how sin de-humanises and robs us of life, but the Spirit makes us more like Christ, the most fully alive human of all. And when we are like Him, it’s good for everyone. Fruit brings blessing. It’s a manifestation of the life of God’s kingdom, bringing the sweetness of the Lord’s presence to the people and places where it’s tasted. In that way, it furthers God’s mission. The fruit in our lives is a signpost to the life-giving God.

The fruits listed by Paul –love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are needed more than ever in our world today. Too often, some of these have been absent in our individual lives and in that of the Church that bears His name. But over recent months of lockdown very apparent in the patient faithfulness and the kindness of many of you in Shotts, Allanton & Hartwood. Our Gracious God at work and active in our midst.

So today, do not hide your fruit under a bowl! Instead, put it out on the table, that people may taste your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. As followers of Jesus, may we be open to let God work and move in our lives and situations that we may share the love and truth, kindness, compassion, healing and peace that God wants to bring through us for our families, neighbours, workplaces and communities.