

One Body by Rev. Joe Evans

Scripture Lessons: Exodus 1: 8 – 2: 10 and Romans 12: 1-8 Sermon Title: One Body Preached on August 27, 2017 I've been in this room many times before. The first time that I remember being in this room it was to hear a children's Christmas Pageant. I was in 3rd grade and some of my friends were up on a stage, that I think was right back there, and they were dressed as little angels – and it was in that moment that I never wanted to be a part of a choir. I've been in here also for Cub Scout Troop meetings. I was a member of Troop 252 which still meets here at this church, and every year we'd have the pinewood derby in this room. An enormous track stretched the length of this room and we'd line up the cars we'd made by ourselves or with our parents, a heat of 8 or 10 cars at a time, and they'd race downhill. It was terribly exciting. I've been in this room for youth group events too. Years ago, we had something called Ventures in here. It happened on Sunday Nights, and then in High School we'd do a big grilled chicken fundraiser to raise money for the Mexico Mission Trip. We'd eat in this room. I haven't been in here for a long time, but when I'm in here I think of all those moments, especially those afternoons when we'd come here to play basketball – so excited as 15 and 16 year olds can be about basketball – but sometimes we'd hit that door only to realize that Scottish Dancing or something else was already happening in here and we'd have to go somewhere else to play. I remember complaining to someone about it, maybe it was Paul Sherwood who used to schedule which group had which room and at which time, and he told me that with a church this big we have to work together – we have to use a calendar and reserve our rooms, and no, I couldn't just play basketball whenever I wanted. That's the reality of life in community. You can't just play basketball whenever you want. You have to think of others. You have to plan ahead. You have to be mindful of what everyone else is doing.

So, Paul tells the church in Rome that we must think of ourselves, not as individuals, but as part of something bigger – as a part of the body of Christ: “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.” That makes sense when you think of a room like this – we have to be aware that there are many members but one body and we have to work together, we have to schedule, we have to be mindful, not just of what we want to do and when we want to play basketball, but of how we fit into the whole. That's how it is in a church, that's how it is in a family, that's how it is in a marriage, that's how it is in friendship, but today it seems to me that this way of thinking is no longer very American.

Today, a lot of kids don't need a basketball court like this one, because they have their own in their driveway that they can play on whenever they want. There's a danger in that. There's a danger in the ability to do what you want when you want, because you may have the freedom to shoot basketball whenever you choose, but you'll almost always play alone. We were not meant to play alone, and so I worry about our society. I worry about what it is doing to us to have these freedoms that we have, this wealth that provides us two cars per household and we don't have to car pool because we can just drive ourselves. There's a danger in that, because if we are able to do most everything that we want to do when we want to do it we start to think of independence as a virtue, and of course it is, but we Christians know better than to think of ourselves and our success as independent of the work of others.

So it is in our first Scripture Lesson from the book of Exodus. Certainly, you know who this story is about, the heading of chapter two tells you everything you need to know, it's the story of the "birth and youth of Moses." But notice that Moses wasn't mentioned in our reading for today – he's not given a name until verse 10. This story isn't really his story yet – the first two chapters of Exodus is the story of strong women whose names have mostly been forgotten because our world values some functions more than others and imagines that success comes independently. The heroes of this story are Shiphrah and Puah.

The king of Egypt said to them, "when you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birth stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." Perhaps Pharaoh was so foolish about power, believing that only a man would rebel against him toppling him from his throne, but here he underestimated two midwives who saved the lives of innumerable boys, saying to Pharaoh, "the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." This is strength – and these are two who Moses depend on. These two are named in chapter one of Exodus, because these two women, Shiphrah and Puah, matter. Without their faith in God, Moses would have been killed at birth. More than that, by these women we know that Moses was not the first to defy Pharaoh's orders. He was not the first to stand before the most powerful man in the land without cowering. These two women went before him, defying Pharaoh's power, refusing to follow his orders, finding a means to execute justice in a time of terror and fear. But their names could have been forgotten.

Moses is the name that we remember today. He is the one who seems the most important, as it is his function as liberator of the Israelites, bringer of the 10 Commandments, and as the guide into the Promised Land that has been valued by generations of the faithful over these two who function as his crafty and brave midwives. When we remember their names: Shiphrah and Puah, we make two bold proclamations: 1. That the successful, the heroic, the rich and famous – they are always dependent, not independent. 2. While we are tempted to value some functions more than others, when we do so we are fools who fail to see reality for what it is. That's why Paul said it like this: "For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment – for we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, ministry, teaching, but may the exhorter remember that without the musician there is no worship, without the printer there is no bulletin, without the person who knows how to operate the projector there are no words on the screen – without the one who gives in generosity there is no church, without the deacon there is no structure, without the elder there is no leadership – without you there is no me and without God there is no grace – we are not independent but completely and utterly dependent, individually we are members one of another. But - on the other hand, are there not those to whom names like Shiphrah and Puah are utterly forgotten? We know the names of the celebrity, but what about her mothers or housekeepers or agents of celebrities, it's not their function as nurturers or promoters that society values, it is the one they nurtured or promoted whose name goes up in lights.

The same is true for so many in our world who live their lives disconnected from reality and ungrateful to those who held them up. A pastor I know, Rev. Bill Williamson, was known for saying, "There are some people who we were born on third, but think that they're there because they hit a triple." So, it

goes for the well born who go their whole lives believing that they deserve their privilege, the entitled who believe it is their right to receive gifts and handouts, the 15-year-old boys who get upset when the basketball court is being used for Scottish Dancing. For some life is easy, blessings overflow. And should they ever ask why, we should pity those who reach the conclusion that they deserve what they have been given. Paul urges you, “not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think,” as those who fall into positions of power, prestige, and privilege without recognizing how they got there miss out on the opportunity to be thankful. Tina Fey is not a notoriously religious woman. She’s a comedian, but in her book titled “Bossypants” she included a prayer titled, “the Mother’s Prayer for Its Daughter.” The prayer begins, “First, Lord: No tattoos,” and it ends with this: “And should she choose to be a Mother one day, be my eyes, Lord, that I may see her, lying on a blanket on the floor at 4:50 AM, all-at-once exhausted, bored, and in love with the little creature whose poop is leaking up its back. “My mother did this for me once,” she will realize as she cleans [who knows what] off her baby’s neck. “My mother did this for me.”

For Moses, there were two incredible brave women, without them he never would have breathed his first breath. Then for him there was a mother who hid him as long as she could before she placed him in a basket and prayed; and then there was his sister who watched the basket float downstream into the hands of Pharaoh’s daughter. His sister was brave enough to suggest that a Hebrew woman be called to nurse him and Moses grew up nurtured in Pharaoh’s house by Pharaoh’s own daughter and his own mother. Without these women, there would be no Moses – so who can say that one gift is better than another. For you there are others – some whose names you remember while the memory of others has faded. There are generations of faithful, those who witnessed firsthand the mighty acts of God all the way to the forefathers and foremothers of this church who gave us a place to hear the Good News and be saved. We are the recipients of their legacy. Give thanks for them all, because without them there is no you – and honor their legacy by remembering that independence is an illusion, for we are all dependent on one another – and without interdependence there is no us.

But we live in this world where so many want to have their own basketball court. If God were our Kindergarten teacher I believe he would give us all that harsh mark of: “doesn’t play well with others.” And what’s worse, we’re getting used to it. The constant bickering on the opinion page of the paper and the soapbox of Facebook is starting to feel normal. We have forgotten what it means to live together in this world, we study politics while losing sight of community, and you can see it because we are growing used to life on our own couches, watching the news channel that we agree with, forgetting how to interact with the person who lives next door doing nearly the exact same thing. A room like this then is precious, for our world is really no different than this Holland Hall where we have to respect that many people are working together, reserving space, racing pinewood derby cars one minute and Scottish dancing the next. There is room for all of us – but there is no more room for selfishness that thinks only of what I want and need, and there is no more room for arrogance – for we, who are many, are one body in Christ.” I saw it plainly ridding in a funeral procession. We passed the Havoline Express Lube on the corner of Whitlock and Polk Street. As we passed the men and women working there stopped what they were doing, rushed to the street, and placed their hats over their hearts. It was a vision of community – and to me, it was a preview of the Kingdom of God. Amen.