

*One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, "Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?" The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known." When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian." (Exo 2:11-15a NIV)*

Together with the Church we pray a collect of this week: *Merciful God, kindle in our hearts the fire of your love, that we may serve you and our neighbor according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.*

Dear friends of our Lord and savior IX<sup>1</sup>: Just because a story is in the bible doesn't mean that it is a recipe for our action today or this week's Seminary agenda and your to-do-list.<sup>2</sup> Just because there are biblical stories of murder and adultery, of cheating, stealing, lying, fraud and corruption doesn't mean that they are condoned or even promoted. The contrary is true! These sometimes hair raising stories are told and written down as a warning against wrong doing. They want to show us, that we should definitely not go over to the dark side and do wrong and commit evil, because that always meets up with God's judgment, wrath and condemnation sooner or later. Don't be fooled, God will not be mocked. Rather we should rather suffer this temporary evil, give room for God's revenge and righteous judgement and thus overcome the evil with good in the long run. God states his holy will very clearly in his commandments and those are summarized in the golden rule of love God above all else and your neighbor as yourself or formulated with the words of this weeks watchword: Jesus Christ said: *'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'* (Mt.25:40) We know that he even prayed for his murderous enemies pleading his Father: *"Forgive them, for they know not, what they do!"*

---

<sup>1</sup> Reading Holy Scriptures is a daunting task. Comprehension is not a given. Quoting something biblical doesn't mean, that it reflects true theology. Rather we depend very much on the Holy Spirit for guidance for proper interpretation, preaching and teaching. We know from our Lord Jesus, how people can be deaf with hearing ears and be blind with seeing eyes. Nobody is as blind and deaf as those, who will not see and hear. The Jehovah's Witnesses are a classic example of those, who speak a whole lot on God's Word, but get it entirely wrong and leave most things upside down, because they don't recognize the Father in the son IX.

<sup>2</sup> An example of wrong application of biblical truth even if somewhat humorous is if we mix 2 different stories and come up with an entirely wrong interpretation e.g. telling the story of Cain killing his brother Abel or of Judas Iscariot hanging himself and then adding Jesus admonition at the end of his parable on the good Samaritan: *"Now go and do likewise!"*

Allow me to point out another side of God's mysterious ways and dealings with us human beings. God himself called Samson to judge his people of Israel and be a terrible scourge on the Philistines. Now Samson was not your average person, rather he was a very special person, who had a very distinct calling<sup>3</sup> from God. Martin Luther calls him a "Wundermann!" Perhaps you could paraphrase that as a "Man of miracles and wonders", perhaps "Superman" would be even more appropriate. Samson's violent acts of impudence and terror were extra-ordinary. Remember when he caught some wild foxes, set their tails alight and let them run wild into the wheat fields of his enemies thus scorching these food parlors to the ground. Or recall, when he tore down the temple structure over all his enemies so that they were buried alive and found a horrible death with him under those stones and beams. That's not ordinary, not regular and not our daily schedule.

Moses was a singular "Wundermann" too – especially in his later life, but even his salvation from the River Nile and the murderous blades of the Egyptian militia falls into this category: Miracles & wonders.<sup>4</sup> Today's lesson is about the young Moses, who was raised as prince in the house of Pharaoh. Trained in the ways of the high and mighty kings of Egypt. He was a bit of a hothead and firebrand. Somewhat rebellious too. Perhaps we would titulate him an activist or freedom fighter as he was on the side of the slaves and not so much on that of the tyrants, government forces and slave drivers.<sup>5</sup> In his zeal for righteousness and justice, he stood up against one of those Egyptian bullies, busy hitting one of the Hebrew slaves. He stood up for this man under attack. Someone like Luther's lonesome traveler through the marshes, who is confronted by a mugger, robber and murderer. You see, although we are to suffer all hurt and harm quite willingly and even patiently, but it would harm the violent transgressor if he would get away scot-free and unopposed. Therefore Luther advises armed resistance and violent response especially if we would protect and

---

<sup>3</sup> "Beruf"

<sup>4</sup> Just look at him facing up to Pharaoh and his people and leading the Israelites through the Red Sea and into the promised land – well, at least nearly. Moses died outside the promised land – seeing it from afar, but not entering in. He had forfeited this right, but claiming God's honour and glory as his own merit and worthiness, when God had let him get water for the thirsty people by striking on the rock face with his staff/rod. See, God will not have himself taken lightly or even slightly mocked. Rather he's a jealous God, who wants all honour and glory due to him given to him also! So Moses did not enter the promised land. That was a privilege reserved for Joshua and the new generation of Israelites – the free born - who had only heard about their parents sojourn in the Egyptian slavery, but themselves had only been born later and on the way through the desert and always aiming for the promised land. Yet I'm running too far ahead.

<sup>5</sup> In the letter to the Hebrews we read: By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. (Hb 11:24-27 NIV)

guard another persons body and life. Luther stresses that the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment calls for us to be quick to *“help and support”* our neighbors *“in all of life’s needs.”* Therefore if we see him in duress or even under attack, we should be quick to stand up for him and help to protect, assist and secure him – even with the use of force. In the Large Catechism he warns us: *“If you see anyone who is innocently condemned to death or in similar peril and (you) do not save him although you have means and ways to do so, you have killed him.”* So Moses was trying to help here too. Do what is right. Standing up for the least of God’s people. In this case an outlawed slave without any human or constitutional rights, beyond the protection of the strict laws of Egypt, utterly at the mercy of this merciless slave driver, who was giving him a harsh dressing down and violent thrashing and might even have killed him if he had not been stopped. It is a clear case of putting down boundaries. You may not go beyond this line. This is not your right. You are trespassing and infringing on this workers rights.

Although Moses might have had the moral upper ground, he still anxiously looked around. He knew he was breaking common law and committing a crime in Egypt – and in all the world really. Something like Dietrich Bonhoeffer planned to do when conspiring to find a way to assassinate Hitler. Bonhoeffer was aware that he would be transgressing German law and even divine law: *Thou shall not kill!* Yes, and *everybody is subject to the authority over him.* And *You shall not lift your hands against God’s anointed!* He recognized that he was going beyond the boundaries of the law and thus becoming an outlaw. He was willing to fall into the spokes of the turning wheel to try and stop or at least break and impede the murderous machine of total war started by this absolute tyrannical dictatorship. He was under no illusion, that he could escape innocent, keeping his hands clean, without stain and very real guilt. Rather he knew full well that this would sully his hands, get them bloodied and have himself branded irrevocably as transgressor of the law in the eyes of the powers that be and even in God’s eyes too. Yet Bonhoeffer went ahead, trusting the grace and forgiving mercy of the triune God. We can read that in his very special hymn: *“Von guten Mächten wunderbar geborgen...”*

We don’t know, whether Moses deliberated on these issues. It would seem as if he was acting on the spur of the moment. There and then he stood up against that solitary oppressor, beating him up, bringing him down, killing him and then concealing the corpse as best as he could, hiding it in the desert sands. He was guilty of murder. Moses knew, he was crossing legal boundaries and going beyond the legitimate realm sanctified by the ruling law of Pharaoh. His wary eyes searching

for possible witnesses betrayed him and his guilty conscience. He knew, he was acting against the law of God and man: *You shall not kill!* Still, he took the law into his own hands. He lifted his hand against the assailant and exercised capital punishment on his own accord and as a law to himself. That of course was a crime and punishable by death too. "*Whoever spills blood, shall have his blood spilt also!*" Perhaps he was acting in accordance with a higher order and divine law like we heard in Luther's explanation of the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment in the Large Catechism: "If you see anyone who is innocently condemned to death or in similar peril and (you) do not save him although you have means and ways to do so, you have killed him." So Moses like Bonhoeffer was really in a catch 22 situation: *Damned if you do, damned if you don't!*

I'm sure, the Hebrew, who was thus protected and revenged was quite relieved to get away from that damned punishment. Without thinking too much about the consequences and just out of plain gratitude he may have spread this news of his lucky break in shantytowns that night so prince Moses killing that Egyptian was probably headlines in all of the slave slum. If Moses had hoped, that he could get away with murder and that the Hebrew slave would somehow shut up and keep this secret safe, he was soon to be disappointed. It was not to be!

The very next day Moses was again found in the thick of things, right there on the busy building site where slaves were busy, busy slaving away. Same procedure as every day. And again conflict flared up. This time two Hebrews were at each others throat.<sup>6</sup> Moses tries to intervene, mediate, reconcile, act as peacemaker. Instead of pulling back and consenting to this arbitration, one of the offenders pipes up cockily: "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Well, not much insight, solidarity, respect or understanding there. Not much gratitude or appreciation for Moses attempts at diplomacy and mediation. Rather the fighter goes on to attack Moses: "Who are you to point fingers? You yourself fought yesterday and you killed a supervisor. You're a criminal – a murderer. So what have you against me?" That's an unveiled threat. That's taunting Moses. Daring him to make another wrong move. Moses catches the hint. He's afraid now. Quite rightly so: "Everybody knows - not just in the slave quarters, but also in Pharaoh's high places, in the judicial courts and police stations. They were all out to get him, because such public violence and lawbreaking was a severe threat to political stability and could

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Verdi: Nabucco "choir of the Hebrew slaves" Why fight each other if the enemy is the Egyptian tormenter? The obvious question is: Why not direct your anger at the bullies, aiming your frustration to harm them instead of hurting your own brother and adding to the unbearable burden these poor oppressed already carried by just being Hebrew slaves?

easily snowball into open rebellion and a general slave uprising and bring about revolution and upheaval of the status quo. So it had to be stopped right there and then. That was the highest priority. This was a matter of national security, of good peace and order, preserving social structures and political constitution. So when Pharaoh *"heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian."*

Moses had tried to take matters in his own hands. He wanted to save, unshackle and liberate the Hebrew slaves. He did not abide God's timing and law, but just did it his own way. In the end nothing was improved. Ok, the slave got away to live another day. A poor person had been saved from despotic wrongdoing. And our Lord Jesus Christ says: *'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'* (Mt.25:40) But on the whole, things just got worse and Moses had to flee, run away, go into hiding.<sup>7</sup> Political liberation of the Hebrews was probably further away than before. Perhaps the slave drivers were even harsher now than before. Moses himself had to wait in exile for God to restore him, let the dust settle and eventually bring him back and make up lost time for his own hastiness and overzealousness. God shows us, how Moses tried to fix things on his own, prematurely and get them straightened out even against God's good will, by hook or by crook. Impatiently he had tried to force God's hand, who had already promised to sort things out in his own good time, deliver his people from the tyranny of Pharaoh and bring them into the promised land beyond the Jordan by his plan, device and method.<sup>8</sup>

Well, Moses had to first cool off somewhat. He had to still learn many, many things – and not only theology, but the very basics of life. That's why he had to get down to learn to serve as a shepherd for many years, being there for the sheep day in day out – in good and bad times, in sun and rain, hot and cold weather. This was a good school for somebody, who was to lead God's people as we know from the later king David too. Mainly however Moses had to learn to wait on God the Lord and to abide his good timing and his means and ways and not go against the laws of God even if it seemed opportune and even politically correct at the time. God alone could deliver Israel from the hands of Pharaoh – and not the hothead Moses and most important not by trespassing God's holy laws. Moses himself was in need of delivery, salvation and emancipation.

---

<sup>7</sup> Similar to Jacob running away from his brother Esau, whom he had wronged and severely harmed and betrayed.

<sup>8</sup> Jacob also was the bearer of God's promise, but through his own machinations delayed things considerably and at a high price of harming the greater family, especially the parents and siblings.

The triune God did his gracious service and saving ministry on him in due course – far out in the desert and hidden from the public eye. In the end he brought Moses back to Egypt, gave him a rod and staff, placed his brother Joshua at his side and as his vocal mouthpiece and explained to him what to say and to do and thus ultimately demonstrate his utter dependence on God, his grace and goodwill, his mercy and caring guidance before he brought him to confront his most powerful counterpart, alter ego and nemesis - the archenemy Pharaoh. This absolute despot and tyrant was to release God's people - the captive Hebrew slaves - from the tyranny of slavery, servitude and bondage. Eventually it all happened by the mighty word of God alone: *"Let my people go!"* It took time for this word to sink in with Moses, with the Hebrews, but also with Pharaoh. God's word is powerful and does exactly what he wants it to accomplish. This word brought about many miracles and wonders there in Egypt. One was more onerous and troublesome than the previous one. Until God's messenger, his angel of wrath and vengeance came through Egypt and killed the first born in every house. He only passed those and let them live, who had been marked with the saving blood of the slaughtered Passover lambs.

God himself had eventually come to judge, save and deliver his people. Revenge, justice and righteousness are in his hands. He is God after all. So, you too wait on the Lord. Let him do his work and you wait for him and his deliverance. He will surely not forget you, but release you at the given time and bring you to his promised land - your eternal salvation with all saints and blessed martyrs. In the mean time love, fear and trust him above all else and love your neighbor as yourself. Yes, practice to pray in his name for those, who persecute you: Father forgive them, for they know not, what they are doing. Bless those, who curse you. And give praise, thanks and all glory to him, who is our God and our redeemer. Amen.

Hymn 724,1-3.4-7.8-10