

spice known as myrrh. Myrrh was one of the gifts presented to Jesus as a young child; it was offered to Him on the cross, and it was used to anoint His body for burial. Their very name reveals the journey of the lives of these “Marys” who were present for the crucifixion and yet, they also are the first to see the empty tomb, they are the first to testify to the resurrection. These women, in their strength and courage, bear witness to the hope and joy of the entire world. In what ways have you found hope in the midst of suffering? Can you imagine joy borne of pain? How do the Marys inspire faith?

Prayer: Lord, remind us that there is hope even in the depths of pain and despair. Amen.

Sermon Notes



Series: EXTRAordinary

Sermon: Standing at the Door of the Tent

Numbers 27:1-11

Then the daughters of Zelophehad came forward. Zelophehad was son of Hopher son of Gilead son of Machir son of Manasseh son of Joseph, a member of the Manassite clans. The names of his daughters were: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders, and all the congregation, at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and they said, “Our father died in the wilderness; he was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against the Lord in the company of Korah, but died for his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father’s brothers.” Moses brought their case before the Lord. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: The daughters of Zelophehad are right in what they are saying; you shall indeed let them possess an inheritance among their father’s brothers and pass the inheritance of their father on to them. You shall also say to the Israelites, “If a man dies, and has no son, then you shall pass his inheritance on to his daughter. If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father’s brothers. And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the nearest kinsman of his clan, and he shall possess it. It shall be for the Israelites a statute and ordinance, as the Lord commanded Moses.”

Monday: Read Exodus 1:8-22

The very anonymity of these two women provides an unlikely counterweight to Pharaoh's power. Exodus provides no word of their ancestry, nor does the text hint at any characteristics or qualities that would set them apart for what is about to unfold. They are two ordinary Hebrew women, whose only point of intersection with the likes of Pharaoh comes through their vocation of midwifery. Pharaoh, in contrast, stands as the very incarnation of a deity in that day's culture. He speaks with the authority of state and of a god. Shiphrah and Puah make a critical and dangerous decision—their obedience takes the form of disobedience. For these two, following orders becomes secondary to following God, their safety and wellbeing put aside for the sake of others. In what ways are you willing to risk your own comfort or well-being for someone else? When have you acted with courage in the face of adversity?

Prayer: Encourage me, O God, to keep faith with you and to act for others. Amen.

Tuesday: Read Ruth 1:6-22

Ruth's place in the larger story is made unmistakable by its opening and closing words. Verse 1 locates the story in the time of the Judges, that dark period in Israel's history when people did what was right in their own eyes, which led to a moral perversity that violated all the covenantal obligations God had laid on his chosen people. Indeed, Judges ends with a gruesome gang rape and the kidnapping of multiple women to become forced brides. Women were brutalized in those times. Ruth's faithful profession in verses 16-18 pledges her allegiance to her mother-in-law, but also to Yahweh, changing not only the trajectory of her own life but also the future of all people. The book of Ruth ends, "So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son...they named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David." Ruth's bold steps, even as an outsider, ensure her place in the ancestry of David and remind us that, in unpredictable ways, God can restore us, fill us, and give us hope. How do you step out in faith? In what ways can you trust more fully in God's faithfulness?

Prayer: God, help us to take bold steps of faith with you. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Esther

Living as a religious minority requires careful and sophisticated judgments about how and when to claim Jewish identity. The question of how to claim identity occupies much of the early story about Esther and Mordecai. But ultimately, deliverance comes through claiming their Jewish identity. Esther takes a great risk in revealing her true Jewishness, but the king responds favorably, and the Jewish people are saved. We are reminded God has not abandoned God's people. No matter how bad things get for Jews under the hand of foreign powers, God is still God. It's a reminder, too, for those of us who struggle to claim our identity within a dominant culture that would have us be everything else first, Americans first, or employees first, or consumers first, a reminder, that Christ is our ex-

ample, our teacher, our Lord. When do you struggle to embody your identity as Christian? How can you more fully live as a disciple of Christ?

Prayer: Jesus, help me to claim my identity as your disciple. Amen.

Thursday: Read Matthew 15:21-28

Can Jesus learn? One traditional interpretation of this passage is that Jesus was testing the faith of this woman, that he didn't really mean what he said about ministering only to the Israelites or calling her a dog. The other possibility, of course, is that Jesus' own sense of God's kingdom is challenged, stretched, and enhanced by his encounter with this fierce and faithful woman. We tend to forget that Jesus was as fully human as he was divine. Maybe, that is, Jesus is serious – that is, he believes he was sent only to the Israelites – and the woman challenges him and, in fact, persuades him that something larger is at stake. She won't let Jesus go until she wrests a blessing from him on behalf of her daughter, and in the process, perhaps Jesus learns that God's kingdom and his mission to enact that kingdom is bigger than he had initially imagined and that it is more encompassing than he'd at first dreamed. This tenacious and faithful woman, a complete stranger, pushed Jesus to reconsider, to learn, and to grow. Who in your own life is challenging your assumptions and pushing you to learn and grow? How are you open to listening to a "new word" on your journey of faith?

Prayer: Jesus, teach me your ways that I might learn and grow. Amen.

Friday: Read Luke 18:1-8

This parable begins with the introduction of the judge who neither fears God nor respects people. The un-respected people are represented here by a widow whose relentlessness is so bothersome to the judge that she ends up receiving the justice she demands. It is here that the widow becomes our teacher. The widow had no rights. She, in fact, did not have access to the judge, but that did not blight her to bitterness, nor temper her trust. She kept right on calling, trusting despite all evidence to the contrary that there would be a breakthrough in her hopelessness. Perhaps the parable suggests that a sign of faith will be a willingness to persist, despite all odds believing that God is—and will always be—present. In what ways can you relate to the persistent widow? Why is it difficult to trust God in seemingly hopeless situations and more importantly what allows you to "hang on" when hope seems lost? How can (or do) you persist?

Prayer: God, help me to be persistent in prayer, trusting that you are with me. Amen.

Saturday: Read Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; John 19:25b

"Mary" in the New Testament is the Greek equivalent of the Old Testament Hebrew names Miriam, given to the sister of Moses, and Mara the name Naomi adopted to reflect her great sorrow in the book of Ruth. The name means bitterness, sorrow, or trouble, reflecting the pain and grief each woman bore, though in differing circumstances. The root word of this name is the same as for the