

November 1, 2009
“Living Extraordinarily”
Exodus 1.15-22

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Last Sunday we celebrated the Reformation. I suggested many scholars believe we are in the midst right now of another reformation. Rick Warren said the first reformation was about creeds. This reformation is going to be about deeds. The first reformation focused on creeds divided the church. This reformation focused on deeds holds the potential to unify the church as we put aside our differing beliefs long enough to allow our hearts to be broken by the suffering in this world that is breaking the heart of God and join hands, regardless of our differing beliefs, to alleviate that suffering.

Something extraordinary happens when your faith moves from your head to your heart and you allow your heart to break open over the suffering of others, when your heart breaks open God’s love flows in and then pours out into the world.

Dallas Willard said the greatest danger of the Christian church these days is not that we think too highly of ourselves. We don’t think of ourselves highly enough. We don’t believe or trust what God can do with one ordinary life, or one ordinary church community like this one. We have forgotten that throughout all of history God has used ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things.

Have you ever heard of Joseph Daniels? My guess is no. He’s not famous. He’s just an ordinary guy living a fairly ordinary life. Joe’s pretty excited these days as he’s a Yankees fan . . . season ticket holder in left field.

One cool September night at the top of the 6th inning, a foul ball was hit into the lower left field stands. It was heading right towards a boy about 8 years old who had obviously come to the game that night hoping for such a moment. He was wearing an over-sized Yankees cap and an over-sized glove.

The foul ball was arching directly toward this boy's outstretched hand, and his face was beaming with anticipation. But suddenly a man around 35, wearing an expensive knit shirt and horn-rimmed glasses, reached over the boy, knocked him to the side, and caught the ball. He held the ball proudly in the air for a second; seemingly even prouder he caught the ball without spilling his beer. The boy, despite his mother's comfort, was clearly crushed. Every one in the left field stands saw this happen. After an uncomfortable pause it was back to business as usual – the umpire fished another ball out of his pouch and tossed it to the pitcher – PLAY BALL.

All eyes in the stadium were focused on the infield for the next pitch, except for one ordinary Joe seated just a few rows up from the boy.

Joe Daniels was infuriated by this man's callous act. His heart broke for this boy and wanted to stick up for him, but he tried to talk himself out of it – "Don't say anything...don't get involved...it's just a baseball for crying out loud. Mind your own business."

But he just knew in his heart he had to do something. Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever known in your heart you had to do something – you try to ignore first, talk yourself out of it? Augustine said – Hope has a two day life, anger at the way

things are – courage to do something about it. That’s when hope rises.

Joe stood up, pointing down at the guy with the horn-rimmed glasses, said, “Hey, buddy...have a heart...give the kid the ball!” Nothing. The guy didn’t budge. So, Joe said it again, ‘Come on...give the kid the ball!’ He said it a third time, and this time the gentleman next to him chimed in: “Yeah...give the kid the ball!” He said it again, with a few others in his section joining in: “Give the kid the ball!”

Horn-rims shook his head and shoved the ball in his pocket. This inflamed the whole left field crowd, and with one voice they all took up the chant, “Give the kid the ball!” It spread to the center field stands, then to right field, including people who didn’t even know what had happened; and they were all saying, “Give the kid the ball!” and the words rose up from all over like a rallying cry throughout the ballpark: GIVE THE KID THE BALL! GIVE THE KID THE BALL! GIVE THE KID THE BALL!

Horn-rims had that “deer-in-the headlights” sort of look about him. It felt like the whole stadium was looking and yelling at him – which probably wasn’t too far from the truth. Defeated, he reached into his pocket, pulled out the ball, and handed it to the young boy. Thunderous applause rose throughout all Yankee stadium! It was a victory of a different kind – the kind that doesn’t make it into record books. The kind that really counts. *(From Whispering the Lyrics by Tom Long, CSS Publishing, 1995)*

Now – had Joe Daniels ignored that prompting in his spirit and decided not to keep his mouth shut and not say anything, and go back to his hot dog and beer; business as usual, a young boy

would have cried himself to sleep that night, with an empty glove resting on his nightstand? An “ordinary Joe” living extraordinarily!

I wonder how many children in our world, in our community with empty stomachs, empty hearts, with their hope emptied, cry themselves to sleep at night because ordinary people like you and me are either too wrapped up in ourselves, or don't pay attention to that inner voice and prompting, or perhaps we assume our lives are too insignificant and ordinary to make a difference. Today's Bible story is the story of two of the most important people in the entire Bible. The chances are the majority of you have never heard of these two ordinary, yet remarkable women. Shiphrah and Puah are role models for living extraordinarily. Let me give a little background.

Once upon a time Joseph and his family were hailed as saviors of the Egyptian people and treated as foreign royalty because Joseph had saved the people from famine.

But it took only a few generations for these foreign dignitaries to become feared aliens as the Hebrew people grew in number and began to be perceived as a threat.

Shiphrah and Puah were two Hebrew midwives who lived during the time of a new Pharaoh who the Bible says, “didn't know Joseph.”

This new Pharaoh feared these foreigners and devised a plan to enslave them and forced them into long days of harsh labor building cities and fortresses for the Pharaoh.

Pharaoh's plan didn't work. The Hebrews grew in resolve and number. So Pharaoh made a horrific and frightening decision to

kill every newborn Hebrew male child. And Pharaoh drafted Shiphrah and Puah, the two Hebrew midwives, to do his bidding. It's hard to fathom the horrific dilemma these women faced: either be true to their God and let the newborns live, or follow the Pharaoh's orders and destroy their people's future.

But for these two women there was no choice. They knew in their heart of hearts what they had to do. Despite the tremendous danger to themselves, they defied Pharaoh's orders and spared the lives of the boys.

They stood up to the divine ruler of Egypt, they stood up against the powers of evil, these two ordinary women; and in doing so did something extraordinary – they saved an entire nation of God's people.

I can vividly imagine the Hebrew people around the campfire telling the extraordinary story of Shiphrah and Puah long before they were limited to a mere seven verses in the Bible.

Imagine young and old gathered to hear the drama of how their ancestors had gone from slavery to freedom. Certainly a guy named Moses was central to this storytelling.

But before Moses enters the scene, we hear the tale of two ordinary women who had the courage to follow their heart and defied the great Pharaoh. There's even a little comic relief thrown in the storytelling.

When Pharaoh questions the midwives as to why they weren't doing his bidding, Shiphrah and Puah cleverly respond that the Hebrew women, unlike pampered Egyptian women, are just too strong and give birth too soon for them to get there – a not-so-

subtle jab at their oppressors that would have elicited laughter and nods around the campfire.

It's hard to understand the significance of this story today. But there's no denying the importance of these two women to the history of the Hebrew people and to us.

Had it not been for Shiphrah and Puah, there would have been no Moses . . . no Exodus...no Promise Land...no 10 commandments ...no King David...no Jerusalem...no temple...no Psalms...no prophets...and dare we even say that without these ordinary women living extraordinarily, there would have been no Jesus.

(With thanks to Rev. Steve Lindsey, sermon on October 18, 2009)

If there's one thing the Bible shows us over and over again, it is how God works through US, ordinary folks like you and me to bring about God's Kingdom on earth. And rarely is it because we are all that extraordinary, but rather it is God's love revealed in Jesus Christ that is extraordinary and stronger than any of the challenges in the world. And when we allow that love to flow in our hearts and be poured out through our lives extraordinary things happen!

It is amazing how God uses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things.

Shiphrah and Puah saved an entire nation. Moses, who gathered and led his people to freedom, David, a mere boy, conquered a giant. Mary, a teenage girl, gave birth to a Savior. Peter, a fisherman, established the early church and changed the world. It is no different today. God seeks to use us and our hearts to heal and change the world.

When I think of our stewardship campaign, Hope Rising, I imagine God's dream for our world is like a great jigsaw puzzle. You and I are the pieces in God's hand. Each piece is needed. No single piece is insignificant.

Have you ever completed a puzzle only to find one or two pieces missing? You pull out the cushions on the couch and scour the room to find them. These missing pieces may seem insignificant and ordinary by themselves but they make a huge difference to the whole picture. They are obviously not insignificant. God has created each of us with a unique contribution to make to our world and to our times.

One of the most common mistakes we can make is to believe that our lives have nothing of significance to offer. Most of us underestimate the extraordinary significance of our ordinary lives to God and God's hopes for the world. (With thanks to Richard Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel*, World Vision, 2009)

When we are willing to lay our ordinary piece down on the table, offer God our whole heart - God will use us in a powerful and extraordinary way.

As the saying goes, "God can't steer a parked car."

You know, I wonder how Shiphrah and Puah found the courage to overcome their fears, defy the powerful Pharaoh, and be the bearers of life. And the answer is TOGETHER! And so it is with us, may we encourage one another to take our ordinary lives and live extraordinarily!

May hope rise within us! May hope rise because of us!