

A river turned to blood. Pharaoh did not take even this to heart. Moses had a message from God and he went and delivered that message to the powers that be and Pharaoh said “No” over and over again. We read about the first plague today but most of us know this story. We know that there are 9 more plagues to come, each more disastrous and gruesome than the one before, ending with children dead and then the eventual freeing of the nation of Israel that was under bondage in Egypt. Several questions come to mind as we think about how this passage speaks to us today. How do we press onward when we feel like we are doing what God has asked of us and we receive repeated “no”s? What is our bondage, what does God desire to free us or others from? What is the message that we have from God that like Moses, we are compelled to share with those in power?

I am going to quote Walter Brueggemann, professor emeritus of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary a lot in today’s sermon, his scholarship and his interpretation of this text is compelling to me. Brueggemann says that the Book of Exodus records the contest between the liturgy of generosity and the myth of scarcity -- a contest that still tears us apart today. The Bible begins he says with a liturgy of abundance. The creation stories in Genesis tell a story of abundance and life and it is very good and Israel celebrates that abundance.

Brueggemann says that with the famine in the land that is described in the end of Genesis, Pharaoh introduces the principle of scarcity into biblical faith. This back and forth between abundance and scarcity has been going on for thousands of years. “The gospel story of abundance asserts that we originated in the magnificent, inexplicable love of a God who loved the world into generous being.

The baptismal service declares that each of us has been miraculously loved into existence by God. And the story of abundance says that our lives will end in God, and that this well-being cannot be taken from us. In the words of St. Paul, neither life nor death nor angels nor principalities nor things -- nothing can separate us from God."

But, Brueggemann says, we read this story of abundance in the Bible but we also check to see how the stock market is doing. We hear this idea that there is enough for all but we also are bombarded with thousands of marketing messages each day that tell us we aren't enough and we don't have enough. Moses says that there is abundance, enough so that nobody has to be owned by anybody else, enough so that nothing needs to be hoarded, enough so that all people can have freedom. Pharaoh says No. No to freedom, no to equality, no to enough. Exodus says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. My Old Testament Professor, Dean McBride, who died this past week would tell us that God gave Pharaoh the courage of his convictions. Pharaoh saw resources, beginning with the famine in Genesis 47 as limited, that he needed to get as much as he could, and no rivers of blood or locusts or staffs turning into snakes were going to change his mind.

Brueggemann says that "we, like Pharaoh, have a love affair with "more" -- and we will never have enough. It has become a demonic spiritual force among us, and the theological question facing us is whether the gospel has the power to help us withstand it. We as modern day Christians must confess that the central problem of our lives is that we are torn apart by the conflict between our attraction to the good news of God's abundance and the power of our belief in scarcity -- a belief that makes us greedy, mean and unneighborly. The real issue

confronting us is whether the news of God's abundance can be trusted in the face of the story of scarcity?"

Our young disciples shared with us last week some of the things that may need to continue unraveling in this new time and maybe this predominant story of scarcity is one of those things that needs to keep unraveling. The way of Jesus is the way of life and life abundant. The kingdom of God that Jesus preached is a kingdom where public life is reorganized toward neighborliness.

Can we trust in God's abundance when faced with such a strong story of scarcity? Moses did not know when he began what God was going to ask of him. None of us knows what risks God's spirit may empower us to take. We face strong stories of scarcity. They are everywhere – from toilet paper runs to government funds to food supplies. And yet, we know that there is enough if we all share, if we all trust in God's abundance. Can we trust in God's abundance when faced with a story of scarcity?

When you do, when we declare that God desires freedom and abundance and enough for all, there will be powerful forces that will say no. Over and over again, there will be counter messages that tell us to stockpile, go get yours, be afraid of not enough. But Pharaoh's "No"s and those voices, they are not the final answer. We begin our lives in God's abundance and we end our lives in God's abundance. That is our story.

God desires our freedom. Our young disciples told us that some of us are in bondage to busyness, some of us to pessimism, some of us are not free to go on a run without the risk of being assumed a criminal, some of us can't call the police for fear of being deported. Our bondage is different, but we all need to be freed.

Womanist theology is a conceptual framework that seeks to empower and liberate African-American women in America. Womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas reminds us that the exodus story is a Bible story that has long had deep resonance for the African-American community. She says of today's Scripture, "The exodus story points to the fact that God chose to free a people from circumstances that were contrary to whom God created them to be. God's choice was motivated by the very freedom that is God. faith. It confirms that God's intention is for all people, including black people, to be free to live into the goodness of their very creation. It is only in freedom that people are able to reflect the very image of a God who is free from all human forms of bondage."

There is enough. We can and need to change our systems so that all have enough. I am enough, you are enough for we originated in the magnificent, inexplicable love of a God who loved the world into generous being.

I'll give the final word to Walter Bruegemann. "What we know about our beginnings and our endings, then, creates a different kind of present tense for us. We can live according to an ethic whereby we are not driven, controlled, anxious, frantic or greedy, precisely because we are sufficiently at home and at peace to care about others as we have been cared for.

It is, of course, easier to talk about these things than to live them.. Our faith, ministry and hope in this age are that the Creator will empower us to trust in God's generosity, so that bread may abound for all." May it be so. Amen.