

Thought for the Day for Friday 16th October 2020 by Margaret Tuffin

You may not be familiar with the names Shiprah and Puah. They are briefly mentioned in Exodus chapter 1. These two women were midwives who defied the government in order to save life. The Pharaoh of the day had told his people that the Israelites had become too numerous so in order to diminish the threat of the foreign workforce, he ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill any male child at birth. Years after this he noticed that there were distinctly Jewish looking boys in the streets. He asked Shiprah and Puah why this was to which they wisely explained that the Hebrew women, unlike the Egyptians were stronger and gave birth more quickly and so babies were born before the midwives arrived.

Shiprah and Puah defied authority in order to save lives.

More and more Hebrew children were born and in the second chapter we read the familiar story of Moses in the bulrushes!

We encounter three more women here - the mother who hid her baby boy, Miriam who watched what was happening and Pharaoh's daughter who eventually adopted the baby and called him Moses!

Moses who became a respected leader of the Jewish people, his birth and early years made possible because of five women who conspired together to defy government authority so that life could be preserved.

Shiprah and Puah, names glossed over and almost forgotten, yet many saved by them.

When we ask ourselves what we can do for God's kingdom of justice, so often we think ourselves insignificant. We tell ourselves we can't do very much, our voices count for little.

We believe people like Malala Yousafzai, Greta Kunsberg and Nelson Mandela are and were much more able than we are.

But Andrew Graystone was not well known. One Friday after the bombings at the mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, he decided to go to the local mosque armed with a piece of cardboard on which was written "You are my friends, I will keep watch while you pray". He did not set out to do anything that would make headlines, but that is just what happened, and he received thousands of messages from all round the world. He writes in his book "Faith, Hope and mischief", "we can choose what sort of people we are and to some extent how we spend our time and who we spend it with. I have a feeling that if I am ever called to account for my life by God, God won't ask me "Why were you not a prime minister or president of Archbishop, God will ask me, Why were you not Andrew".

Back to Shiprah and Puah and other women of the Bible who were recognised in the following song sung to the tune The seven joys of Mary.

1. There is a line of women extending back to Eve
whose role in shaping history God only could conceive;
and though through endless ages their witness was repressed
God valued and encouraged them through whom the world was blessed.

So sing a song of Sarah - to laughter she gave birth;
and sing a song of Tamar who stood for women's worth;
and sing a song of Hannah who bargained with her Lord;
and sing a song of Mary who bore and bred God's word.

2. There is a line of women who took on powerful men,
defying laws and scruples to let life live again;
and though, despite their triumph their stories stayed untold,
God kept their number growing, creative strong and bold.

So sing a song of Shiprah with Puah close at hand;
engaged to kill male children, they foiled the king's command;
and sing a song of Rahab who sheltered spies and lied;
and sing a song of Esther - preventing genocide.

3. There is a line of women who stood by Jesus' side,
who housed him while he ministered and held him when he died;
and though they claimed he'd risen, their news were deemed suspect
till Jesus stood among them, his womanly elect.

So sing a song of Anna, who saw Christ's infant face;
and sing a song of Martha who gave him food and space;
and sing of all the Marys who heeded his requests,
and now at heaven's banquet are Jesus' fondest guests.
By John Bell and Graham Maule.

God has told us what is good, God has told us what is right,
We are to live justly:
We are to love kindly
We are to walk humbly:
We are to walk with God.

A prayer

You call us God. You call us to walk in your way.

You show us in Jesus how we should live.

You give us your Holy Spirit to keep us right,

And we are grateful.

Love and justice are what you require of us, God -

Love for you and love and justice for ourselves and for our neighbours.

And we try.

And sometimes we get it right and sometimes we fail, but we try.

Thank you for the words of Jesus,

"Don't be afraid. You are forgiven. I call you friends. Come and follow me."

Amen.

Remember words from Mother Teresa,

"Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love."