

“Faces of Our Face: They Said No”  
Exodus 1: 8-22

Who are the people who stand up for justice? How do they stay focused on the wisdom of God’s love?

When morally dubious choices come our way and are the norm of our culture, how do we listen to God’s guidance? Let’s watch a video from a Harvard psychology class about moral dilemmas:

[https://youtu.be/\\_BnUigauY\\_I?list=PLH37By4v\\_fxl-VGRzq7R6yC4-uSihxAHK](https://youtu.be/_BnUigauY_I?list=PLH37By4v_fxl-VGRzq7R6yC4-uSihxAHK)

If you had to tell the truth even if it hurt someone you love, would you still do it? We would like to think that we would do the right thing, but the odds are ever against us. We have the social pressures and our own justifications that often mislead us, especially down the slippery slope of moral compromises. Here is a quick example from a scientific experiment:

<https://youtu.be/iRh5qy09nNw>

The Asch conformity experiments were a series of psychological experiments conducted by Solomon Asch in the 1950s. The experiments revealed the degree to which a person's own opinions are influenced by those of a group. Asch found that people were willing to ignore reality and give an incorrect answer in order to conform to the rest of the group. Most of us would like to think that we are non-conformists and that we can stand up for what is right all the time. But the moral choices we often face are not always clear. That is why we need stories of faith that help guide and inspire. We also need communities of truth and spiritual practices that ground us in God’s love.

In today’s Bible story we hear about two women who made courageous non-conformist choices that could have gotten them killed.

Today's Bible story is about two women who followed God’s will even when it was inconvenient and unpopular. Their names are Shiphrah and Puah. They were the midwives that Pharaoh ordered to kill all male infants of the Hebrew people as they delivered them.

After living for about 400 years in Egypt, according to Exodus the Hebrew people were despised by the new Egyptian administration who saw them as a threat. This story of vilifying immigrants is a tale as old as time. People often find a group to victimize or to blame for their problems. This is often an old political trick to help mobilize people through hate. This kind of hate and prejudice becomes the fuel for a lot of morally unacceptable behaviors. This is what the king of Egypt was counting on from these two midwives. Even though they had dedicated their lives to birthing children and helping women, they were being asked to do something bad for the greater good of their country.

The Egyptians had long forgotten about Joseph and how he had helped their people and now it was time to get rid of these foreigners who seemed to multiply and do well in Egypt.

One of the tactics to get rid of the Hebrew people was to kill their male newborns which would ensure their annihilation. But this evil plot is disrupted because the midwives "feared God." A better translation would be "were in awe of God," meaning they knew God's amazing love and power. They had this incredible reverence and love for God. Scholars tell us that midwives at that time were women who were deemed infertile. In a culture where having children and a family was the ordinary way to build a life-to gain respect, to know the blessing of God-these somewhat marginal women, found their place in the community by helping other women to bring forth new life. Their daily work, their daily routine, and what they got up in the morning to do, were all for the sake of helping to bring forth life. And then came the order for them to be agents of death. The choice was difficult because Pharaoh had incredible power. In addition, the cause was protecting their own country from the people who were seen as their enemies. These two women were endangering their lives and their families because their convictions and faith were not compromised. They dared to lie to Pharaoh in order to save the lives of children that were not of their own people. Their courage and actions were rewarded by God as they had their own children after this experience. Also, their courage brought tremendous blessing and hope for the people of Israel then and for generations to come because what they did ended up protecting the life of Moses, the faith leader who helped bring the Israelites out of Egypt into freedom. What if these women decided to play it safe? What if they just followed the orders of the king? What if they thought that their faith is important but only when life is comfortable?

What can we learn from their example? It is of course easy from a hypothetical point of view to believe that we would be like them if the time came for us to make such choices. But it is very important for us to admit that in life, our moral choices are not always easy to discern; from the little acts of aggression we display when provoked to the great mistakes we make when we believe that our group/tribe is always right. This is especially hard in an age of so much information and misinformation coming at us all the time.

Yet, we know people like Shiphrah and Puah who are so grounded in God's love that even when hardships come their way, they navigate them with grace and without resorting to hate, fear, or violence. Let's take a few moments to share with each other about such people in our lives or world and what we can learn from them...Then let's take two people who are willing to share.

What if we applied 1 Corinthians 13 to our daily living choices by asking, "Is my next choice the most loving choice that I can make?" Love is not weakness. It is about tapping into our strength of soul to hold other accountable for mistakes without losing sight of the divine image in them. Let's take a moment to bless each other. Using the papers you received, turn to your neighbor, and say the words of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Insert their name in the blank spots where normally the word love is present. This is not wishful thinking. It is about a belief that through God's power, we are capable of letting our souls take the lead.

\_\_\_\_\_ is patient, \_\_\_\_\_ is kind, \_\_\_\_\_ does not envy, \_\_\_\_\_ does not boast,  
 \_\_\_\_\_ is not proud, \_\_\_\_\_ does not dishonor others, \_\_\_\_\_ is not self-seeking,

\_\_\_\_\_ is not easily angered, \_\_\_\_\_ keeps no record of wrongs, \_\_\_\_\_ does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth, \_\_\_\_\_ always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Amen.