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Exodus 1:8-22  
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## Midwife Conspiracy Committee

Pharaoh was afraid. He was afraid of invasion and rebellion. He feared sea peoples sweeping through the land of Goshen in the Nile delta. He was afraid of the mass exodus of valuable Hebrew labor. Fear can be a terrible thing, it is based on our own insecurities and ignorance. Pharaoh's fears remind me of how the United States put people of Japanese descent into concentration camps during World War Two.

But, Pharaoh should have feared the conspiracy of women.

Today, scripture gives us a story of trickery. Like Rahab lodging spies or Jacob tricking his father for a blessing. Pharaoh told the midwives to kill Hebrew sons, but the midwives conspired together to let the boys live. Pharaoh told people to throw Hebrew sons into the Nile, so Moses's mother placed him in a basket somewhere she knew he would be found. Pharaoh's daughter knew Moses was a Hebrew son, meant for death, so she adopted him. At each step, these women conspired to save lives, and so the Hebrew people multiplied and became very strong.

Pharaoh was afraid, but he should have feared the conspiracy of women.

But what kind of conspiracy? How did the midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, manage to trick Pharaoh? How can we sit at their feet to learn to be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves?

The midwives explain to the pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." Is this true? No, the text says they let the boys live or they saw to it that the boys lived. Instead, the midwives play into Pharaoh's fear, calling the Hebrews vigorous. This translation is a bit PG than it could be. We could also translate vigorous as uncivilized, barbaric, or animalistic. Pharaoh is primed to believe this stereotype, like confirmation bias, where people tend to believe anything that supports our prior beliefs.

This is a compelling strategy of the disempowered. Consider Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream speech." In his speech, King plays into the script of American exceptionalism. Talking about America as a "vast ocean of material prosperity," a place where "all men would have the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." But when African Americans try to cash that "promissory note," it comes "back marked insufficient funds." Did King believe that the American dream was oriented toward freedom? Frederik Douglas famously said, "What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim." So, probably not any more than the midwives believed that the Hebrew women would give birth without them. I believe this is a strategy taking advantage of the confirmation bias of the powerful.

So what are we supposed to do? This is a call to wisdom and strategy. Whenever we work toward God's kingdom, Jesus calls us to be as shrewd as vipers and innocent as doves. This could take the form of arguing for the American ideal of religious freedom in our public speech, as we say anyone can believe anything they want. At other times, we may speak to one another and say, but we believe in peace. Therefore, we will speak out against war. We may say that the United States was not founded as a Christian nation, while at the same time, we know in our hearts how the United States as persecuted non-Christians. This passage challenges me to not be passive, like a midwife who passes the Hebrew child for someone else to kill. But go to the halls of power and say, I've not seen any Hebrew boys. Like last Sunday, this scripture is a call to civil disobedience, a call to obey God, rather than any human authority. So let us join the Midwife's Conspiracy and tell Pharoah what he wants to hear.