



## Crossing Boulevard

with Rev. Rachel

### 20 **WHEN YOU ACT AS MIDWIVES** Exodus 1

Exactly two years ago I was feeling the heat. It was time to double down. Ordination papers would be due in early December. The Vocation and Leadership committee—candidates sit before this one and three others—wanted to know how I defined myself as a leader.

Question 1: “What is the vision of ministry inherent in your call?”

*I see my call to ministry as a call to midwifery. The church is a delivery room. God can use me to bring forth life.*

*Midwives are trained and often seasoned, but never robotic. They are acutely aware of their surroundings. Every birth is different. People send for them. They are trusted co-laborers.*

*Midwives enjoy special bonds with others who do what they do. They are uniquely present to unspeakable moments of beauty and tragedy. Where they go and when is not always predictable. They are responders, and therefore see their practice as intertwined with human need.*

And then: “What Bible stories inform your vision and its ministry?”

*I marvel at the way Puah and Shiphrah were able to address Pharaoh (Ex 1:19). I also look to Rachel, who dies while giving birth, for the work of midwives is serious (Gen 35:16-20). One other story through which I see my ministry is Moses’. As he births a new people, I see God acting as the great obstetrician.*

Among the sentences I composed then, one in particular leaps out as if to demand that I pay it some fresh mind. *I will have the privilege of helping them “push”.*

Who is this “them”? Um. That would be parishioners, brothers and sisters in Christ, co-laborers—you. And thus, the litmus test: If I come and go from this place and all appears barren...that’ll spell failure.

Am I saying that you are pregnant? Maybe. Do I know or do I think you know what you are carrying? Not necessarily. Am I suggesting some thought on the matter? Yes!

Not for me, but for the God who says not if, but when you act as midwives (v.20). ‘The vision of ministry inherent in my call’ may not be mine. It may well be ours.

### **Matthew 16:13-20** (CEB)

Now when Jesus came to the area of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Human One is?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”

He said, “And what about you? Who do you say that I am?”

Simon Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Then Jesus replied, “Happy are you, Simon son of Jonah, because no human has shown this to you. Rather my Father who is in heaven has shown you. I tell you that you are Peter. And I’ll build my church on this rock. The gates of the underworld won’t be able to stand against it. I’ll give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Anything you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. Anything you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven.” Then he ordered the disciples not to tell anybody that he was the Christ.

### **Exodus 1:8-2:10** (CEB)

Now a new king came to power in Egypt who didn’t know Joseph. He said to his people, “The Israelite people are now larger in number and stronger than we are. Come on, let’s be smart and deal with them. Otherwise, they will only grow in number. And if war breaks out, they will join our enemies, fight against us, and then escape from the land.” As a result, the Egyptians put foremen of forced work gangs over the Israelites to harass them with hard work. They had to build storage cities named Pithom and Rameses for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they grew and spread, so much so that the Egyptians started to look at the Israelites with disgust and dread. So the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites. They made their lives miserable with hard labor, making mortar and bricks, doing field work, and by forcing them to do all kinds of other cruel work.

The king of Egypt spoke to two Hebrew midwives named Shiphrah and Puah: “When you are helping the Hebrew women give birth and you see the baby being born, if it’s a boy, kill him. But if it’s a girl, you can let her live.” Now the two midwives respected God so they didn’t obey the Egyptian king’s order. Instead, they let the baby boys live.

So the king of Egypt called the two midwives and said to them, “Why are you doing this? Why are you letting the baby boys live?”

The two midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because Hebrew women aren’t like Egyptian women. They’re much stronger and give birth before any midwives can get to them.” So God treated the midwives well, and the people kept on multiplying and became very strong. And because the midwives respected God, God gave them households of their own.

Then Pharaoh gave an order to all his people: “Throw every baby boy born to the Hebrews into the Nile River, but you can let all the girls live.”

Now a man from Levi’s household married a Levite woman. The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She saw that the baby was healthy and beautiful, so she hid him for three months. When she couldn’t hide him any longer, she took a reed basket and sealed it up with black tar. She put the child in the basket and set the basket among the reeds at the riverbank. The baby’s older sister stood watch nearby to see what would happen to him.

Pharaoh’s daughter came down to bathe in the river, while her women servants walked along beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds, and she sent one of her servants to bring it to her. When she opened it, she saw the child. The boy was crying, and she felt sorry for him. She said, “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children.”

Then the baby’s sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Would you like me to go and find one of the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?”

Pharaoh’s daughter agreed, “Yes, do that.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I’ll pay you for your work.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. After the child had grown up, she brought him back to Pharaoh’s daughter, who adopted him as her son. She named him Moses, “because,” she said, “I pulled him out of the water.”