The Lessons Appointed
for Use on the

Sunday Closest to August 24

Proper 16
Year A
RCL

Exodus 1:8-2:10
Psalm 124
Matthew 16:13-20

The Collect

Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.
Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick
and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, “When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.” But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?” The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.”
So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.”

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a dis-
The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him, “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” 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 will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she
brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, “because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”
Psalm 124

*Nisi quia Dominus*

1 If the LORD had not been on our side, *  
   let Israel now say;
2 If the LORD had not been on our side, *  
   when enemies rose up against us;
3 Then would they have swallowed us up alive *  
   in their fierce anger toward us;
4 Then would the waters have overwhelmed us *  
   and the torrent gone over us;
5 Then would the raging waters *  
   have gone right over us.
6 Blessed be the LORD! *  
   he has not given us over to be a prey for their teeth.
7 We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler; *  
   the snare is broken, and we have escaped.
8 Our help is in the Name of the LORD, *
the maker of heaven and earth.
When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the
kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.
When I was a kid, we went to Myrtle Beach each summer where we stayed in Mrs. Poindexter’s boarding house. It was right on the beach so we slept each night with the sounds of the waves in our ears. It was a really delightful place to stay and I remember it well because that’s the place I met my first girlfriend. I was playing in the surf on an inflatable raft when I first saw her – a pretty girl with dark hair. On the next wave, I arranged my raft so that I would be slammed right on top of her. For two nine year olds, this was high romance. We played together the rest of the vacation, but we were sternly warned daily of the riptide. Mom was fearful of a riptide, so whenever Jeannie and I went
to play in the surf, we got “the lecture” again, warning us that if there was a riptide, we were not to swim against it, for it was too strong for us, we’d become exhausted and drown, so what we were to do was to swim WITH the riptide, parallel to the shore, until we could reach solid ground.

One bright day, we were playing in chest deep water when we noticed that we were drifting away from the Poindexter. No matter what we did, we were swept further and further from the sea wall that marked “our” beach. That’s when mom’s warning about riptides came into my mind. We began swimming parallel to the shore, just as we had been taught. The power of the ocean was amazing. Just as mom had said, trying to swim back toward
the Poindexter was impossible, but swimming AWAY from the Poindexter in the direction of the tide was like gliding on glass. Eventually, our feet touched solid ground and we threw ourselves on the sand a good distance from the Poindexter.

Here’s what we learned from our adventure: first, the ocean does what the ocean does for the ocean’s own reasons, and you are subject to it; second, swimming against the will of the ocean will exhaust you and you might well die; third, if you amend your own desires and effort to the reality of the ocean instead of fighting it, you might well find yourself on a beach with a pretty girl.

There’s a big idea here. The events of the world as told in Genesis and Exodus reflect the tide of
God’s will. God’s will, like a riptide, acts to accomplish His purposes. Opposing it leads to death. Submitting to the will of God, leads to life.

To see God’s riptide in action, we need to learn a little of Egyptian history.¹ Something like 4,000 years ago, a people known as the Hyksos moved into Lower Egypt – the area around the Nile delta. The Hyksos were a conglomeration of ethnic groups, probably from Canaan, and spoke Semitic languages related to Arabic and Hebrew. Initially, the two groups lived peacefully together. Gradually, however, people with Semitic names replaced Egyptians in high administrative offices. The Joseph saga fits into this historical narrative hand

¹ The following is taken from https://www.lds.org/ensign/1987/12/research-and-perspectives/who-was-the-pharaoh-who-knew-not-joseph?lang=eng
Joseph, representing the Hyksos immigrants, rises through Egyptian society until he is second only to Pharaoh. Because of his position, he is able to bring his whole family to Goshen, in the delta. In no other time of Egyptian history would this have been remotely possible.

Imagine that you were a citizen of Lower Egypt as this was happening. What would you think about foreign people with foreign customs reaching positions of power? Would the “Egyptian you” be pleased with this marginalization of people of your culture? Wouldn’t you oppose it? And that, of course, is just what happened. Opposition arose from Upper Egypt, where a native family had retained control. That family arrayed itself against
the Hyksos rulers of Lower Egypt, defeated it, and established the New Kingdom. Their experience with foreign rulers, though, left them with a fear of outsiders.

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.”

Those who are like me are my brothers. Those who are not like me, my enemy. Put on your Egyptian sandals again. What do you think of this new turn of events? The Hyksos occupation was a humiliation for the Egyptians that had a profound effect upon the national psychology. After the New
Kingdom was established, the tolerance once shown which permitted Joseph to rise to high office was replaced with hostility. People with Semitic names were put to hard labor.

Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

So fearful of the Israelites did the Egyptians become that infanticide was sanctioned.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and
the other Puah, “When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.”

It’s interesting to me that Scripture gives us the names of the midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, but does not name the Pharaoh of the Oppression. The great and powerful Pharaoh doesn’t get even a mention in the closing credits. Pharaoh is just a bit player. It is God who is acting and God’s people must be about God’s business. That business required them to return to Canaan, and that couldn’t be managed if they were living satisfied lives of comfort in Lower Egypt. Pharaoh’s actions simply prepared the people for the move by making conditions in Egypt intolerable. The people were ready,
the time was right. God swept through Egypt leaving crushing sorrow save for those houses whose lintels were smeared with blood and the Israelites left with their few belongings, borne by God’s riptide on their way to Moses’ meeting on the mountain of God where they would be welded together as a people governed by the Law of the Lord.

My interest here is in those two time periods in which I asked you to imagine yourself to be Egyptians. The first, you’ll recall, was during the Hyksos period, a time in which Egypt was dominated by foreigners. There is no way the “Egyptian you” could have conceived that this national humiliation was part of the riptide of history decreed by the God of the Israelites. Given our human tendency to
be tribal, to favor those of our own over any outsider, I believe that the “Egyptian you” would have been resentful, and would have looked forward to a time when these foreigners got what they deserved.

The second period I asked you to imagine was the establishment of the New Kingdom when the long-wished-for expulsion of the Hyksos became a reality and Egypt again became Egyptian. As before, you couldn’t know that God’s riptide was moving His people to their meeting with their God at the mountain, so you would look with horror and resentment at the plagues and thirst for revenge. The Egyptian you, in other words, would walk like an Egyptian against the flow of God’s riptide, setting off to vent your fury on the Israelites. Swim-
ming against God’s riptide leads only to death, and the waters of the Red Sea closed over those who swam against God’s riptide.

Here’s the thought I want you to take from this talk: first, God does what God does for His own reasons and you are subject to Him; second, swimming against the will of God will exhaust you and leads to death; third, if you amend your own desires and effort to the reality of God instead of fighting Him, you will live.

AMEN
BENEDICTION

In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Go with God’s riptide, church.

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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