

Renewed Midwives Wanted
Exodus 1:8 – 2:10; Romans 12:1-8

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“I exhort you, my sisters and brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your earthly selves as a living and holy sacrifice, well pleasing to God (which is your reasonable response to God’s love). Do not be shaped by the values, customs, and standards you see everyone else following, but be transformed by the spiritual renewal of your minds, that you may discern God’s will: what is good, acceptable, best.

“Through the grace given to me, I say to every one of you not to think of yourself more highly than you should but to evaluate yourself soberly, each of you according to the faith God has given you. For just as one body has many members but the members do not all have the same function, so we many are members of the one body of Christ, and also members of each other.

“We each have gifts that differ according to the nature of the grace given to us: prophecy according to the faith given to us; service in serving; teachers in teaching; the exhorter in exhorting; the giver in sincerity; the person leading us in diligence; the one caring for others with cheerfulness.”

(Romans 12:1-8, KL)

Let's say you need to get your taxes done. I know it's not tax season but why not, let's have a little fun. Let's talk about taxes. You need your taxes done. You don't want to do them yourself, so you find an accountant. Would you expect your accountant to be up to date on all the latest changes to the tax code? Would you expect your accountant to know the latest ways to save you money? Would you expect your accountant to have all the latest computer software and electronic filing information? Would you?

Yes. Of course, you would. You would expect that of any competent professional. If you needed a lawyer, you would expect your lawyer to know about the latest changes to the law. You would expect your lawyer to keep up with the changing times not just in matters of the law, but also in privacy issues, billing and running a business.

The same for a doctor. You would expect your doctor to keep up with the latest changes in the field. Bacteria and viruses are constantly evolving. The drugs the doctor was prescribing twenty years ago may no longer be effective. Good doctors are constantly staying up in their field. The same goes for nurses, EMTs and even midwives. Technologies, techniques, preferences, even health concerns are always evolving. Midwives need to stay up to date just as much as anyone else.

Midwives, midwives, do not create, do they? No. Midwives assist. Midwives assist with something new coming into being. When you think about it that way, **midwives** is a pretty broad term.

Imagine you are a consultant for a business. The business is trying to move in a new direction. To remake itself. As a consultant you could say you were a midwife to the new business.

A good supervisor at a manufacturing plant trains the new hires. Teaches skills and tricks of the trade. The supervisor midwives new hires into competent professionals.

Teachers. Children going to school are not adults. They are maturing into adults. Teachers help children find their path to

adulthood. Teachers, in a very real sense, midwife adults into being.

Sunday school teachers, pastors, youth-group leaders – they all help us grow in faith, adapting to the changing world around us. They midwife us into mature, thoughtful, adaptable Christians.

You and I then, all of us, are midwives. As Christians, we are spiritual midwives to others, but we are also midwives to the church. Both the larger, universal church and our own personal church. Churches are constantly becoming new, constantly giving birth to new versions of themselves. Midwives help.

Good churches are never static. They are always evolving. Some of the changes are simple and obvious. You seldom see ladies wearing hats and gloves anymore. Hardly any men wear a tie to worship these days. Things change. Churches evolve.

Other changes are much larger but harder to see. Mission emphasis changes as mission needs change. What we teach in Sunday School changes as the needs of students change. The preaching of 50 years ago was good if you lived 50 years ago. But it wouldn't go over well today. Those sermons would be much too long for us, and they wouldn't address our needs very well.

Good churches are always evolving, changing, giving birth to new, reformed versions of themselves. Remember the great motto of the Reformation. I'm sure you've heard it. "Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda". "The Church reformed and always reforming." The Church reformed and always reforming, always becoming more and more the church God wants us to be.

You and I are midwives, constantly helping our church give birth to a new, more godly form of itself; a form more adept at ministering to the needs of our time. To do that well, we can't allow ourselves to be shaped by our culture, by the values, customs, and standards of everyone around us.

Instead, we must be constantly transformed by spiritual renewal. We must be constantly growing in faith because the world around us is constantly changing. We, the newer form of the church, must be ready to answer the questions and challenges of our times.

It used to be women were not considered able, capable, or even worthy of being ordained to the ministry. Since then, slowly, we have had a spiritual renewal. We now understand our attitudes towards women were driven more by the misogyny and patriarchy of the Ancient World than by the radical inclusion and empowerment of the gospel. We now have a spiritually transformed understanding of the equality of all people.

It used to be homosexuality was considered an abomination. But that belief was built on Roman anti-Hellenism, not the radical inclusion and empowerment of the gospel. We now have a spiritually transformed understanding that what matters in a relationship is that the partners form a lasting bond, one that mirrors the love and commitment God has for us.

We used to think antisemitism was perfectly logical. We now have a spiritually transformed understanding of how much God cares for all people, and a deeper appreciation that the Jewish people are God's chosen ones. We Gentiles are deeply loved, too, but the reality is we are branches grafted onto the tree.

We used to believe the environment was something we had to conquer and control, and were free to pollute and even destroy. Now, we have a spiritually transformed understanding of how the environment is one of God's great gifts to us and we honor God by honoring the gift, by treating it well and using it sustainably.

In each instance we have experienced spiritual renewal of our minds, discerning God's will for what is good, acceptable, best.

But those are the issues of long ago. What are the issues of today? What are the concerns we as individuals and we as a

church need to be aware of and address? What are the tangible problems with which our culture is grappling and for which we must provide answers reflecting God's will of what is good, acceptable, best?

How about access to birth control and abortion care? Is that one? Or, how about caring for children struggling with their gender identity? Is there room there for transformation and spiritual renewal? What about the flow of immigrants into our country? Can we help our country discern God's will in this matter? And what about forces who are still advocating antisemitism and who want to ban Muslims? Can we be a force for what is good, acceptable to God, and best?

The airwaves and the internet are booming with voices trying to coopt Christianity for their own purposes. They are loud and seductive. They have slick ads and professional spokespeople. If you and I are going to resist their siren song, if you and I are going to help the church speak out on these issues, if you and I are going to help midwife a new church into being one that can bring down these horrors, we must be constantly growing in faith. We must be constantly transformed by the spiritual renewal of our minds. We must be constantly transformed by the spiritual renewal of our minds.

Standing up to these forces and helping birth a church to counter them is hard, yes. Pharaohs always resist threats to their power. Resisting the Pharaohs of our time will require channeling the faith and determination of Shiphrah and Puah. We are going to have to show the same courage and conviction they showed to Pharaoh.

The church that existed when you and I were young is different now. The church you and I grew up in would not be able to speak to today's issues, or even to us, very well. But God was busy. God was busy creating a new thing, a new church, and the men and women who were there helped midwife it into being.

And now, my beloved, now it is our turn. In our time the church needs reforming. In our time, the church needs to birth a new, more appropriate version of itself. In our time, the church must live out its great motto: “Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda”. God has created it, now it is our turn, and our time, to help birth it into being.

Does that sound difficult? Does it rock us back on our heels? Of course, it does. But the ones who came before us were just as apprehensive. Just as uncertain. But they put on their Shiphrah and Puah hats and helped birth the church that has served us so well for so many years.

Now, we honor God and honor them by being the midwives the church needs today. As the capable midwives we are called to be, let us channel the spirits of Shiphrah and Puah. Let us stand up to the powers of today as they stood up to the power of Pharaoh. Let us be transformed by the spiritual renewal of our minds so we may discern what God wills. Not what Pharaoh wills, not what culture wills. What God wills: what is good, acceptable, best.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.