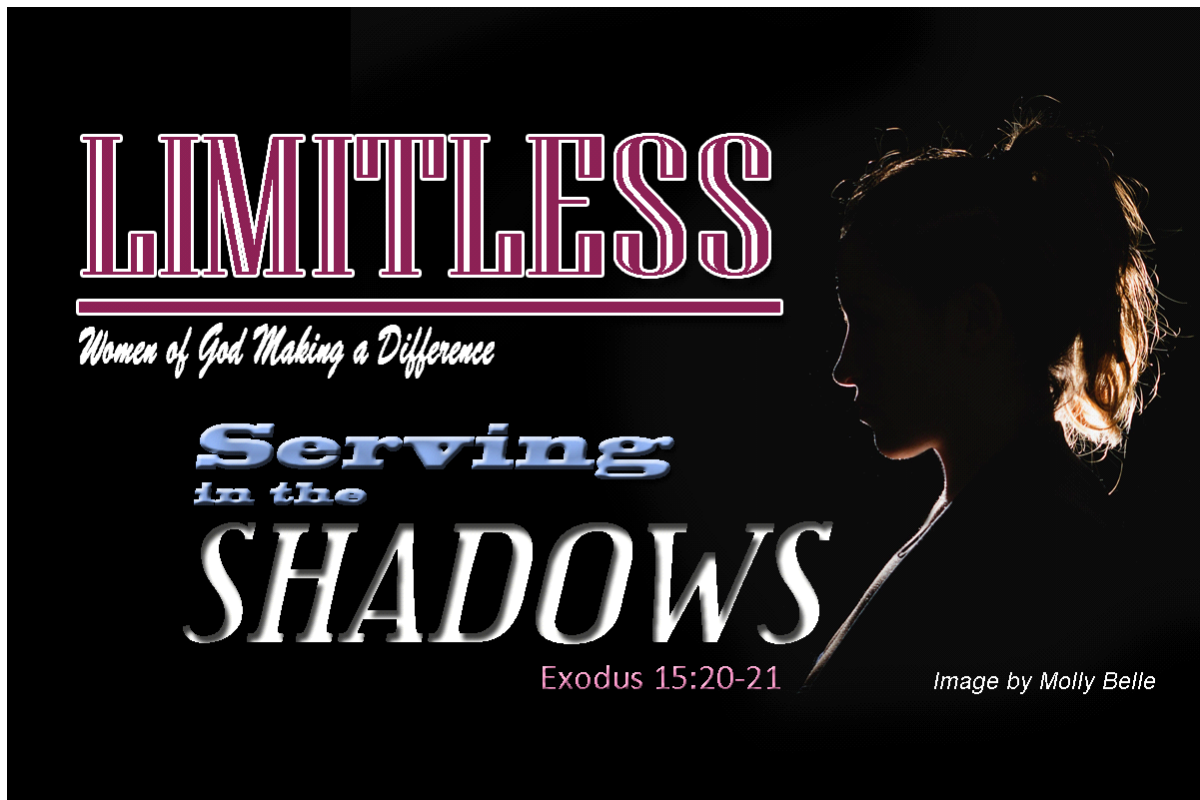


May 24 [Miriam] "Serving in the Shadows

Exodus 15:20-21



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20 Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing.

21 Miriam sang to them:

**"Sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.
Both horse and driver
he has hurled into the sea."**

Special Music:

Hiding in the Shadow of God – Heather Sorenson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZH09f0ekKAo>

Master Sergeant Walter H. Wellborn was a giant among men, standing 5'9" tall and statuesque in his Air Force uniform, proud to serve the nation that he loved. Proud of the family that he had created and humbled to be able to stand in the presence of God. I serve from my father's shadow.

Reverend Max Brennan, an inspiration to ministers everywhere. Given to and preaching the philosophy that all are equal in God's eyes, all are welcome at God's table, all are welcome to God's grace. A giant among theologians, yet tolerated rather than embraced by many. I serve from his shadow.

Reverend Wesley Wellborn, country preacher and abounding in love for his congregation and his community. My uncle and brother of my father. With one mighty hand he reached out to God and with the other he reached out to those in need around him, spreading the love of God everywhere he went. A giant in grace and compassion and tolerant of a school-boy whose only desire was to learn how to serve the same God in the same way. I serve from his shadow.

Perry Noble, Carey Nieuwhoff, Reggie Joiner, Andy Stanely, Pastor YPJ, Dick King, Billy Graham, Albert Schweitzer, Billy Sunday, Martin Luther, Matthew Henry, John Wesley, Charles Spurgeon, William Perkins, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, S. D. Gordon, Paul the Apostle, Barnabas, Peter, James, John, Matthew, Mark, Luke, Thomas, Nehemiah, Job, David, Elijah, Elisha,

Joshua, Moses, Joseph, Jacob, Abraham, Adam and so many more giants. I sit in their shadows. I preach from their shadows. I serve from their shadows.

Jesus Christ, Lord and savior of all mankind, the sacrificial lamb, the good shepherd, the teacher, the healer, the maker of my soul. Son of God, son of man, who went willingly to the cross for the salvation of my soul and the souls of all mankind. The very basis for my existence and my connection through the Holy Spirit with the creator of the universe. Who beckons to me as I stand still in His shadow. I exist in His shadow. I speak from His shadow. I serve from His shadow. He calls to me in the shadow to claim His light.

When we recognize who we are, when we recognize our own limitations and our purpose, we understand that we live in the shadows of the giants around us. Not because we are small or unworthy, but because they are so much larger than life, whether that honor is deserved or not. Can you imagine what it must have been like to be the brother or sister of one of these great persons? Can you begin to understand what it must have been like to have been James as he grew up in the shadow of his brother, Jesus? How does one come to terms with that?

My sister Mary, is an amazing person. Although she is three years younger than me, she has accomplished so many great things in her life. She is far more intelligent than I will ever be and her wisdom has proven so very valuable so very

often. She has extended her hand and her spirit to me when I have found myself in darkness in the rough places in my life. She is always there for me. I am beyond blessed to have her in my life. There are times when I feel like I live in her shadow as well.

But the woman we want to focus on today had the impossible task of helping raise her two younger brothers, who would both grow into giants of such magnitude that it would have been a very easy thing for her to fade into the shadows cast by her siblings.

Let's go back to a story that I mentioned in the sermon on Mother's day. That message was focused on Hannah, but I also briefly spoke about the extraordinary stories of many women in the Bible, who came out from the shadows even though their stories are often diminished due to their gender. A woman had to be beyond outstanding in order for the writers of the old testament to give credence to their stories and allow them to cast a shadow of their own.

In that sermon on Mother's Day, we briefly touched on the story of Moses and how he came into the household of Pharaoh at a time when all the other Hebrew boys that were being born were to be drowned in the Nile. When the basket was retrieved from the reeds, it was Miriam, Moses' sister, that spoke up and was sent to fetch a Hebrew woman, Jochebed, to raise him. We learned that Jochebed was

the mother of Moses. She was also the mother of Aaron and Miriam and the wife of Amram.

One of the great questions regarding the union of Jochebed and Amram concerns who was first born among the children. It was extremely important in Hebrew life to understand the nature of what it meant to be first born. The first-born son was usually the heir to the estate. He was expected to continue the tribal line by having a first-born son of his own. Women were not considered eligible nor expected to receive an inheritance or continue the male blood line. A woman would marry and by doing so continue her husband's blood line by bearing him a son. If her husband should pass away, the oldest brother was to marry the woman and any children produced from that union would be considered the children of the deceased. If the oldest brother did not want to marry her, the other brothers of the deceased were given the opportunity to marry her in order of succession. But by Jewish law and tradition, one of the brothers would marry her. It was their duty as tribute to their deceased brother.

When a Hebrew blood line is recalled, seldom do we hear the names of a woman, unless the woman does something truly amazing. And when we do hear the woman's name, it is usually with the caveat, "the wife of" or "the daughter of." Why is this of any importance to this story? Well, to be honest, one of the great consternations that we find theologians debating in the Bible can found in

Exodus 2:1-2. We have trouble with this passage because we view everything we read through our 21st century microscope. And every theologian that has come before us has viewed it through their tainted eyes and culture as well. If what we read does not pass our present cultural guidelines, we have a tendency to dismiss it, ignore it, or deem it unimportant. The verse reads like this:

“A man from the house of Levi went and took a Levite woman. She conceived and bore a son.”

Off hand, we wouldn't normally find anything to argue about in this verse. It seems very straight forward. That is, until you start putting everything in context in relation to the culture of the time and the rest of the story. You see, the son that she bore was Moses. There is no mention of Aaron or Miriam, and yet, both Miriam and Aaron are older than Moses. And while we might see how Miriam could have been overlooked since she was a woman in a male dominated society, Aaron is the older of the two boys and by right, the heir to the family blood line. But HE isn't mentioned here either. And so, the arguments start and people begin reading between the lines trying to extrapolate or excuse why the scriptures seem to contradict themselves. Scholars bicker among themselves just like brothers and sisters arguing about who came first and why.

I will tell you right off the bat that I am not as literate in old testament scripture as the majority of those scholars. And trust me, volume upon volume of books have

been written discussing this simple contradiction or omission. I will be honest with you, even after reading a ton of contextual information regarding this issue, I still cannot tell you decisively why Aaron and Miriam are not mentioned in this verse of the Bible. It's kind of like saying "John got off the bus" without saying that Brad and Mary got off the bus as well. But here is what we read later chapter in Exodus:

Exodus 7:7

Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.

I want to digress a little here and read the verse again.

Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.

Did you catch the note there that Moses was eighty years old when this whole business with Pharaoh started. Moses was eighty years old before the Exodus. Moses was eighty years old before they left Egypt. Moses was eighty years old before receiving the ten commandments. Moses was eighty years old before wandering forty years in the wilderness leading an obstinate, stiff necked people to the promised land. Moses may have complained that he was slow of tongue, but he never complained about being too old. If I never learn any other lesson from Moses, let it be that I can be of service to my God, no matter how old I am. That I can faithfully serve until the day that I die.

Back to our message. We know from this verse that Aaron is three years older than Moses. And we talked recently about how it was Miriam that interceded on the behalf of baby Moses when he was found floating in a basket in the reeds near where Pharaoh's daughter was bathing. By logic, we can then deduce that Miriam is the oldest of the three. She had to have been at least 6 or more to have handled the conversation that she had with Pharaoh's daughter, but we don't really know how much older.

I want to say here that as Disciples of Christ, we are given the mandate to read and interpret scripture for ourselves. It is a good thing for us to wrestle with verses in the Bible that we do not understand or seem questionable to us. It is one of the ways that God speaks into us. When we struggle with scripture, we learn, and learning is paramount to becoming more of what Christ means us to be. In Hebrews 5 we read:

“12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.

14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”

And, as a side note, many scholars today believe that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written by Priscilla, a woman of God given to teaching and the focus of our message next week.

And while we can sit here and debate the issue of why this great consternation over the birthright of Moses exists, it is pretty much fruitless. What we do need to understand is that because Jochebed raised Moses in the Pharaoh's household, Miriam had to grow up in the shadow of two great men that just happened to be her brothers. It would have been easy to get lost, crouching into a state of diminishment, and no one would have blamed her if she had just faded into obscurity. How does one deal with being the sister to two brothers of the stature of Aaron and Moses?

No one is going to argue that the leadership focus in the story of the Exodus from Egypt is Moses. Likewise, no one is going to dismiss the fact that Aaron was not only his brother, but his right-hand man. But we just don't talk about Miriam much. We don't give her either the credit or weight that her presence deserves. After all, if it were not for her, who knows what would have happened to Moses when that basket was pulled from the reeds. It is obvious that God had a purpose for Miriam, that His hand and His spirit were guiding her. Her part in the triumvirate that was Moses, Aaron and Miriam, was a design that God molded into their hearts and minds, their energies fed upon one another. They all spoke into

each other when they felt a need to. And sometimes, just like with most siblings, what was said was inappropriate and condescending. But for the most part, they lifted each other. Each one pushing themselves and the Israelites towards a new and better life. This is what Exodus 15 says about Miriam

20 Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing.

We learn several very important things about Miriam in this passage, things we don't often talk about:

1. Miriam was a prophet – Her people looked to her not only for prophesy but for interpretation of prophecy. God delivered messages through her. God's hand was upon her as both a leader and a messenger. She was known for her prophecies and her prophecies were accurate or she would never have been labeled a prophet. Deuteronomy talks a lot about what is required to be a prophet, but it boils down to these things.
 - a. A true prophet's prophecies will be true 100% of the time.
 - b. A true prophet will NEVER lead God's children away from God.
 - c. A true prophet will NEVER entice anyone to worship other gods
 - d. A true prophet will be raised up by God alone and not by any man

So, when we say that Miriam was a prophet, she met those conditions and it was obvious to others that the hand of God was upon her.

2. **She wasn't shy – After the Red Sea was parted and the children of Israel had passed through to the other side. After the Egyptians gave chase and God had closed the sea in upon that army. After all the excitement of the event was over, the Israelites sang and celebrated but it was Miriam that grabbed a tambourine and led the women of Israel in a celebration song and dance. That takes a lot of confidence and courage.**

3. **She was a leader – When Miriam started to dance and sing, there was no hesitation from the Hebrew women to join in and follow her. They looked to her with respect and leadership. Where she went, they followed. And note that when she leads the women into a song of praise, it is to God, not Moses and Aaron. She knows who the champion of this victory is and who is worthy of praise. She sings in verse 2:**

**“Sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.
Both horse and driver
he has hurled into the sea.”**

It needs to be said that even as a leader, Miriam supported both of her brothers and lifted them constantly to the Lord. These siblings squabbled just like

siblings will do, but each knew their place, each had the other's back, and each respected the other for the value they brought.

Miriam would always serve in the shadow of her brothers, but that never stopped her from serving. As a leader, it was her sole purpose of following the guiding path of God that as exemplified in her brothers.

Sometimes, to be successful in ministry, we need to serve from the shadows because we recognize the hand of God on the giants around us. We often assume that giants don't need our support which couldn't be further from the truth. Giants can only retain their status as giants if we pray and support them. It does not mean that our service is less regarded or unimportant, but we recognize that the praise is for our heavenly father, and supporting the giants around us is a duty that brings glory to our Heavenly Father.

Some are called to the spotlight. Others to the shadows. But it takes both to have an effective ministry. There are people that cannot be reached by those in the spotlight, because sometimes, it takes someone living in the shadows to reach someone else living in the shadows. Jesus was constantly searching for the lost in the shadows and bringing them into a new relationship with God. We are meant to follow His example

This week, search the shadows around you. Seek out those people that go unnoticed or remain hidden. Do what you can to reach into their lives and share the message of Jesus Christ. Be the hands and feet of Jesus in a world that is looking for answers. The Identity for the Disciples of Christ states “We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.” Together, we can make a difference in this community. Together, we can change the world.

AMEN

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