

## **THE RIVER OF GOD'S CARE**

### **Exodus 2:1-10**

*A man from the family of Levi married a Levite woman. The woman became pregnant and had a son. She saw there was something special about him and hid him. She hid him for three months. When she couldn't hide him any longer she got a little basket-boat made of papyrus, waterproofed it with tar and pitch, and placed the child in it. Then she set it afloat in the reeds at the edge of the Nile.*

*The baby's older sister found herself a vantage point a little way off and watched to see what would happen to him. Pharaoh's daughter came down to the Nile to bathe; her maidens strolled on the bank. She saw the basket-boat floating in the reeds and sent her maid to get it. She opened it and saw the child—a baby crying! Her heart went out to him. She said, "This must be one of the Hebrew babies."*

*Then his sister was before her: "Do you want me to go and get a nursing mother from the Hebrews so she can nurse the baby for you?"*

*Pharaoh's daughter said, "Yes. Go." The girl went and called the child's mother.*

*Pharaoh's daughter told her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me. I'll pay you." The woman took the child and nursed him.*

*After the child was weaned, she presented him to Pharaoh's daughter who adopted him as her son. She named him Moses (Pulled-Out), saying, "I pulled him out of the water." (The Message)*

I'm horrified by this story. Think on this: What sort of desperate despair must this mother have! In the face of her son being killed by the Egyptian soldiers, she puts her new-born baby in a basket, and sets him out to float down a river. Does she know for sure what will happen to him?

Some commentators and preachers over the centuries have tried to claim that she knew that God would look after her son.

But the little note about Miriam, the older sister keeping a look-out to see what would happen to him strikes me as a sad, anxious scene: big sister worrying over her baby brother left to the currents, crocodiles and hippopotamuses. It sounds to me like one of those “I don’t want to watch, but I have to find out” type occasions.

What a desperate mother! And sister!

But then, we can also understand her action as a prayer: to launch her baby out onto the river of God’s care – “As you will, Lord.”

And that “as you will” was not with the assumption that God would provide a river perfect of care, gentle rocking the bay in his basket until he was somewhere safe. There were still the hazards of river currents, snags, crocodiles and hippopotamuses, and the many boats that used the Nile – it was major transport route.

There’s an old lady I know who died some years ago. She would always tell me the story of when her oldest son was born. He was a sickly baby, and was not expected to live many days. So she got up out of her hospital bed and went for a walk.

The nurses chased after her, trying to get her to stay, telling her that her baby would die soon and she should be there for that.

But she couldn’t. She simply told them, “I can’t do anything. He’s in God’s care.”

She had launched him onto the river of God’s care, a river that still had the hazards of other health complications and death itself.

And what about you? What is there in your life, or someone you know, that means being launched out onto the river of God’s care? ...

How do things turn out when launched onto the river of God’s care?

We know Moses was rescued by Pharaoh’s daughter. He was even brought up by his own mother! And we know this was all

part of God's plan to rescue Israel from slavery in Egypt, and establish them as his own people in their own land – the whole Exodus story.

The last I heard, I know the sickly baby is now enjoying a healthy retirement in his old age.

But it doesn't always have what we would call a happy ending.

Sometimes the despair just stays. And the uncertainty on the river remains. The current, or crocodile, or hippopotamus is the end.

We all know people who have been swept away by illness or tragedy.

This happened this last week with the funeral of Karlee Adams. Only twenty eight years old, and after a four year struggle with melanoma. The rescue didn't seem to come. And yet, she would be the first to say that she had lived a good life!

Some would regard these – the current, the crocodile and the hippopotamus in whatever form they take in our lives – as the enemy of God; as going against God's will.

This is the mistaken belief that all God wills for you is health, wealth and peace. It fails to recognise that Jesus himself told us that we will be his witnesses through, not only the good times, but especially through the bad times.

Martin Luther wrote about such a thought:

*Whoever ascribes any bad luck or unpleasantness to the devil or to evil persons and does not, in a spirit of love and praise, accept both evil and good as coming from God alone [Phil. 4:11], responding to God with gratitude and willing submission.*<sup>1</sup>

For Luther, it was a far greater comfort to know that the river currents, crocodiles and hippopotamuses of his life come at God's hand – the hand of the God who loves him – than from

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<sup>1</sup>Luther, M. (1999, c1968). *Vol. 43: Luther's works, vol. 43 : Devotional Writings II* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (43:17). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

the hand of the Devil, who only wants his destruction.

But we should not take this to mean that God sends evil into someone's life. Evil is all around us. It is what has come into God's good creation because of sin.

What Luther is aiming is that comfort we can have in knowing that there is only one Lord over all things, and that Lord is the Saviour who loves us.

Luther believed that, because Jesus died on the cross and rose again, the devil's power over this world has ended. "One little word can fell him," to quote something from the well-know hymn of Luther's, "A Mighty Fortress".

And there is certainly no balancing of power between God and Satan, as I sometimes here people waffle on about. As if God and Satan were simply the yin and yang in a circle of life.

Christ is Lord, and the earth is his footstool.

All there is is what God wills.

What are we to conclude, then? Since these river currents, crocodiles and hippopotamuses are in God's control, then there must be some good in them, some action of God's love; and so one can trust God, even out in the middle of the river.

With St Paul, we can say: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose* [Romans 8:28, TNIV].

And it is just as Jesus taught us: *If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!* [Matthew 7:11, NIV].

So ask him!

You're out in the river. The currents are sending you in a spin. There's croc's that can chomp you up in one bite. There are hippos that can overwhelm you in one splash

But these have all come at God's hand. Therefore,

Ask for deliverance.

Ask for strength to endure.

Ask to understand why.

But most of all, trust. Trust that God has it all in his hands, and in his plan. Amen.