Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer. Amen.

So, When Mother Maria asked me if I would give a sermon, my first thought was, who me? This was through Facebook messenger. I was thinking, maybe she sent this to the wrong person. She must have sensed my fear and anxiety because as I am staring at my phone up pops another message, “Oh it’s no big deal. It’s just like when you did the stewardship message.”  I was thinking, um, yea, I don’t know about that.  She then told me I could do my sermon on a person or on the lectionary. So, I took a look at the list of names.  I think Moses was on there, Paul, was one, Judas was another. So, as I am looking at the list, I see two names, Shiphrah and Puah. I think, well I have never heard of them. I figured, what the heck, first sermon, pick someone you don’t know anything about, and hopefully Y’all won’t either.  That way if I get the story wrong no one will know the difference. Well, except maybe Mother Maria. But seriously, I thought it would be a good opportunity to learn something new.

We find the story about Shiphrah and Puah in the Old Testament in Exodus 1:8 – 21.

Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. “Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.”

So, they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so, the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah ,“When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.” The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, “Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?”

The midwives answered Pharaoh, “Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.”

So, God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

He attempts to limit the growth of the Hebrews, who only seem to grow in number, by dehumanizing them in systemic ways — by slavery, and forced labor, and oppression.  These attempts, however, don’t seem to make a difference.

So, Pharaoh enacts a fear campaign, “What if we were attacked by our enemies and these growing number of Israelites join sides with our enemies?” “We would be crushed!” And this fear mongering starts to shift the opinion of his people and there’s more of a widespread buy-in.

Sounds familiar doesn’t it? This story takes place about 3,460 years ago yet here we are still using these same sorts of tactics, fear seems to be our favorite.

The midwives' refusal to follow the Pharaoh's genocidal instructions "may have been the first known incident of [civil disobedience](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_disobedience) in history.

They can do what the Pharaoh wanted or they can refuse. If they refuse, they could and probably would be killed. Even so, their choice was to refuse. Just think about the courage that it took to refuse. With the threat of death, they chose to do what was right. They trusted in God.

So, with Shiphrah and Puah we have an incredible example of having the courage to do the right thing.

In many ways things haven’t really changed that much from what happened over 3,400 years ago. Slavery only ended 155 years ago here in the U.S. and despite the passing of the civil rights act just over 50 years ago, recent events here in our country highlight the fact that systematic racism still exists here today…but there are other stories of courage just like Shiphrah and Puah.

How many of you know who Ruby Bridges is? You might not remember her name but you may remember this picture. This picture is from November 14th, 1960 and is a picture of Ruby on her first day of school. The first day of integrated schools in New Orleans. Despite many threats, Ruby went to school every day that year. Former United States Deputy Marshal Charles Burks later recalled, "She showed a lot of courage. She never cried. She didn't whimper. She just marched along like a little soldier, and we're all very, very proud of her. If a six-year-old little girl can stand against racism, why can’t I?

How about Claudette Colvin? I hadn’t heard of her until recently. On March 2, 1955 Claudette and three other black students were told they had to give up their seats on a bus for a white woman and she refused. This was 9 months before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus. She was arrested and received indefinite probation. She was 15 years old at the time. If a 15-year-old young woman can stand up against racism, why can’t I?

Then there was Maude Ballou. Maude worked as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s personal secretary and became his “right hand woman”. Her work with the civil rights movement put her in grave danger. Her family was threatened and she was often stalked by the KKK. She was quoted in the Washington Post in 2015 as saying  “I was a daredevil, I guess,” “I didn’t have time to worry about what might happen, or what had happened, or what would happen,” “We were very busy doing things, knowing that anything could happen, and we just kept going.” If Maude Ballou can stand against racism, why can’t I?

And lastly, I would like to tell you about Fannie Lou Hammer. In 1962 she tried to register to vote in Mississippi. When she went to register, she was given a registration test which were tests designed to keep black people from voting. When her boss found out, she was fired from her job. She was told by her boss, “we are not ready for that in Mississippi”. A few days later she was shot at 16 times by the clan for her attempts to vote.

In 1963 she was able to pass the test and then was told she had to show a receipt that she had paid the poll tax. Poll Taxes were another way of keeping black people from voting. Later she was able to pay the poll tax and exercise her right to vote. Her experience inspired her to become a voting rights activist and a leader in the civil rights movement. She was quoted as saying” I guess if I'd had any sense, I'd have been a little scared—but what was the point of being scared? The only thing they could do was kill me, and it kinda seemed like they'd been trying to do that, a little bit at a time since I could remember. With the threat of being killed, Fannie Lou Hammer stood against racism. Why can’t I?

Why can’t I?

I can, and so can you, we can together.

We have heard about the courage of Shiphrah and Puah, the courage of a little girl named Ruby Bridges, the courage of a 15-year-old young lady named Claudette Colvin, and two women Maude Ballou and Fannie Lou Hammer. These are just a few of the stories that are out there. There are hundreds more.

Our brothers and sisters of color have had to endure racism in many forms way too long. I am in awe of your courage, your courage to carry on.

So, what can I do? What can we do?

If a little girl can walk past crowds of shouting protesters and threats against her life because she wanted the same education afforded to white children, I can have the courage to speak up when I see injustice. We can!

If a 15-year-old young woman has the courage to stand up against racism and say “no more” in the Deep South in 1955, then I can have the courage to call out racism when I see it and not just stay quiet because it doesn’t affect me or it’s easier. We can!

If Maude Ballou can continue her work despite death threats from the KKK and others, I can have the courage to speak up even when it goes against the majority. We can!

And then I think about Fannie Lou Hammer. She had to endure voter registration tests, being fired, poll taxes and being shot at just to exercise a right that I take for granted. She had the courage to keep fighting for that right and then didn’t just stop there. She decided to fight for the rights of others as well. If she can do that then I can have the courage to do the same.

I can, and so can you, we can together.

We must. To do this is to share God’s love. We are all created in God’s image and we all deserve to share in God’s love. God loved us so much, he sent his son, Jesus. In Jesus God took on human form and lived among us. He walked with us, he worried with us, he cried with us, he ate with us, he lived as one of us. Then Jesus would show how deeply he loved us by offering himself as a sacrifice. He gave up his life for us. There is no greater love than this. This is the kind of love God wants for us to share.

In John 13 we read, Jesus gave us a new commandment. “Love one another. As I have loved you, Let’s think about those words for a second, As I have loved you. He loved us so much, he gave his life for us.

Jesus said’ I give you a new commandment “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

So if you are wondering why I chose to talk about racism today. It is because I believe it is what Jesus calls us to do. When we speak out against racism, we are living into his last commandment for us. When we take the time to learn about someone else’s experiences we are loving one another. When we demand equality for everyone, we are sharing his love. It is the way of Love.

I would like to share a prayer by a lady named Mary Mcleod Bethune.  We read this during Morning Prayer a few weeks ago so it may sound familiar.

Father, we call Thee Father because we love Thee. We are glad to

be called Thy children, and to dedicate our lives to the service

that extends through willing hearts and hands to the betterment

of all mankind.

We send a cry of Thanksgiving for people of all

races, creeds, classes, and colors the world over, and pray that

through the instrumentality of our lives the spirit of peace, joy,

fellowship, and brotherhood shall circle the world.

We know that

this world is filled with discordant notes, but help us, Father, to

so unite our efforts that we may all join in one harmonious

symphony for peace and brotherhood, justice, and equality of

opportunity for all people.

The tasks performed today with

forgiveness for all our errors, we dedicate, dear Lord, to Thee.

Grant us strength and courage and faith and humility sufficient

for the tasks assigned to us.

Amen