

Justice That Restores

March 4, 2018

Rev. Dominique Gilliard

artisanchurch.com

[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Well before I introduce our speaker this morning I want to read the text that he should be focusing on. It is a fascinating text that many of you heard before, and you're going to get a really interesting interpretation of it. This is from Exodus Chapter one, verse six through chapter two, verse ten. If you like to follow along you can find it on page forty three in the red Bibles.

6 Then Joseph died, and all his brothers, and that whole generation. **7** But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them. **8** Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. **9** He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. **10** 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." **11** Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. **12** But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. **13** The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, **14** 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.

15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, **16** "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." **17** But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. **18** So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" **19** The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the

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Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” 20 So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. 22 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.”

2 *Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. 2 The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. 3 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. 4 His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.*

5 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. 6 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. 7 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?” 8 Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. 9 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. 10 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.”

Now if you were here last night you heard a powerful word from. Dominique. But I didn't I realized until after it that I didn't really give you the bio. I just told you about my friendship with him which is important to me, but I also want you to hear some of what Dominique’s ministry has been. Dominique currently serves as the director of racial racial righteousness and reconciliation for the Love Mercy, Do Justice initiative

<https://covchurch.org/what-we-do/mercy-justice/> of our denomination, the Evangelical Covenant Church. He serves on the board of directors for the Christian Community Development Association as well as ***ever Joe calls for justice*** . And in 2015 Dominic was selected as one of the ECC’s “Forty Under Forty Leaders to Watch”

<http://covenantcompanion.com/40-under-40/> . Huffington Post named him one of the black Christian leaders changing the world

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-mae-elise-cannon/black-christian-leaders-c_1_b_6740024.html , and if you heard him last night you know that to be true. If you've read his book you

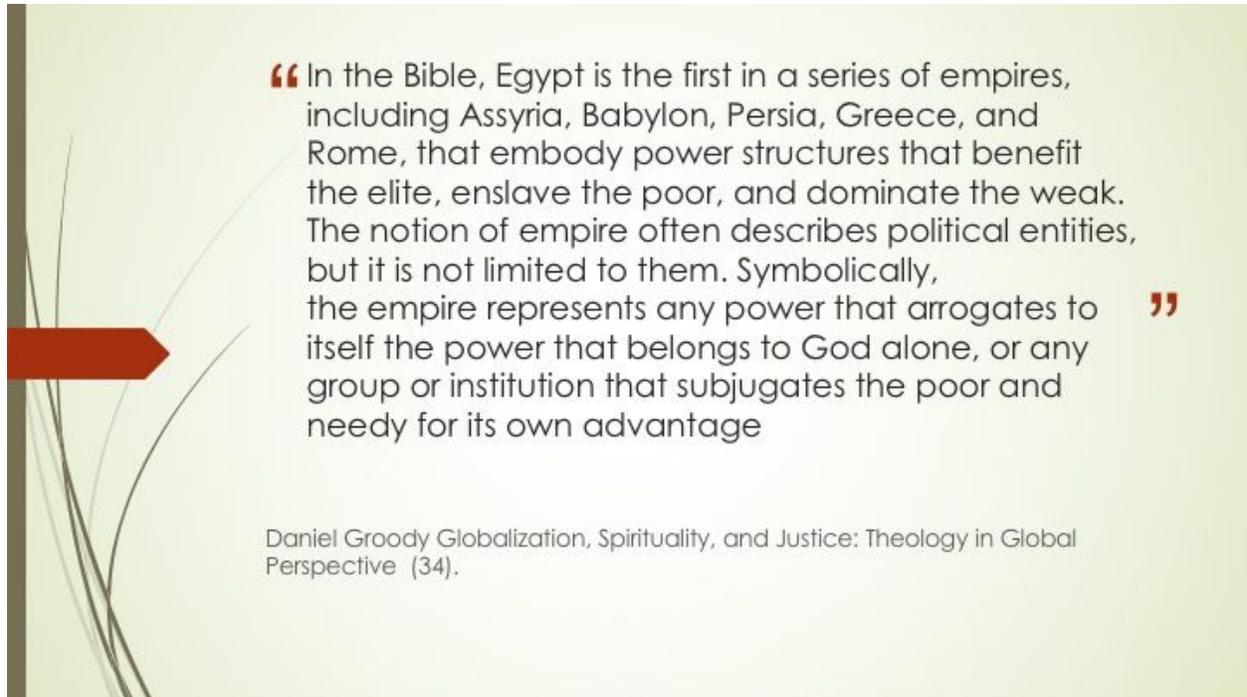
know that to be true. By the way I think we have five copies of it left and let's make sure that we have zero by the time we leave today. Dominique is an ordained minister, has served in pastoral ministry in Atlanta, Chicago, and Oakland, and is now back in Chicago at our national headquarters doing that important work with Love Mercy Do Justice. Dominique is someone I'm proud to call a friend of mine. As I told you last night I met him a couple years ago and I've been so grateful for his ministry - would you join me in welcoming him here today?

[Applause]

[Voice of Dominique Dubois Gilliard]

Good morning. It's a joy to be with you. Last night was a powerful time of recommitment and reconsidering what the Gospel actually causes us to in this watershed moment we find ourselves in. And today's sermon, in a lot of respects, picks up on the same question and some of the same themes. So first I'd just like to thank Scott. I haven't thanked you for bringing me out and allowing me to partake in the lively ministry that is going on here in Rochester, and at Artisan. I'm just really thankful for your pastor leadership and the way that you cultivated the soil so we can have conversations like this. Because in so many churches we can't yet - that's why they hired me to help change that! So you can be praying for me. Because that is indeed a tall task in the moment we find ourselves in.

Before I dig into this text I just really want to say for me for a long time I actually said - when I was pastoring you know - the most challenging thing about the gospel is to live into the verse that actually tells us that we're called to walk by faith and not by sight. And I think that is so challenging because literally everything around us tells us to trust what we see. And when we see the concreteness of oppression, injustice and death it is so hard to believe that we ultimately don't believe that death past the last word, and that God is actually in the midst of reconciling all things to God's Self. And so I think when we read this passage I want you to put yourself in the position of the Hebrews, particularly Hebrew parents, who are literally just told that there is now an institutional decree throughout the entire land and that all of their boys must be put to death. And I think this passage helps us envision something that sometimes we can read in Scripture and we can think, you know that's a nice biblical story. But the reality is we know this kind of oppression in our lives. We know this kind of injustice to be true and real for us today. When we look at this passage I want you to make strong correlations between the world and the empire which we live in and the Egyptian Empire that they're actually describing that this injustice flows down from. And so to help us with this let's go to the first slide.



And this is one of the reasons why I think we actually don't do this intentionally as we should as the church is because we lack a theology of empire. And we don't understand this notion of empire and how this helps us to understand how countercultural we must be as the people of God living in the midst of worldly empires, bearing witness to the kingdom which is an alternative empire. An empire that is literally antithetical to the world's empires and what they're built upon. So I'm going to give you this definition of empire that comes from a theologian by the name of Daniel Groody he says:

In the Bible Egypt is the first in a series of empires including Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, that embody power structures that benefit the elite, enslave the poor, and dominate the weak. The notion of empire often describes political entities but is not limited to them. This is the key point Symbolically the empire represents any power that aggregates to itself the power that belongs to God alone, or any group or institution that subjugates the poor in the needy for its own advantages.

Biblically - literally the entire Bible - is written in the in the context of empire. So everything that we're reading about, what God is calling us to, God is calling us to this in the midst of worldly empires. Which helps us to understand that we (historians say) Rome used to be the most powerful empire the world had ever known but historians say that the US is now actually the most powerful empire the world has ever known. So in the midst of living in the most powerful empire the world has ever known this passage has profound significance for us today because it actually points to what are the people God supposed to do in the midst of worldly empires.

How should our lives be marked by our faith and how our witness to be so countercultural that the empire actually sees us as a threat that needs to be snuffed out? And ultimately we know this what happens with Jesus when they ultimately crucify him. He was the leader of this countercultural revolution in the Jesus comes at the time into Rome in the midst of the most powerful empire the world has ever known. Jesus comes in and inaugurates the kingdom of God and says that there is an alternative plan, vision, mission and reality that ultimately will unfold from the goodness of God. And that is the invitation that Jesus gives to the church. To partake in the countercultural revolution, to bear witness to the truth of the love mercy in Jesus, and justice of Jesus Christ in the midst of worldly empires that have other priorities. And so that's the backdrop for this sermon, and so let's go to the next slide.

Imperial Oppression

- I. Empires are manipulative & hegemonic.
- II. Empires are predicated upon fear mongering.
- III. Empires propagate a placebo peace, a peace that is predicated upon violence, warfare, subjugation & murder.

Empire's are predicated upon fear mongering

"He said to his people, 'Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. ¹⁰ 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.'"

Empires are manipulative and hegemonic.

"Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor."

Empires propagate a placebo peace

"When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him... Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, 'Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile'"

Those are these are three things that I want you to take seriously about empires as we press into this. The first - there are three hallmarks of empires - empires are predicated upon fear mongering. The text says 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." All predicated upon fear. Everything, all the injustice, all the oppression that comes is all stemming from this first place where he starts to produce fear within the people. The second (point) empires are predicated upon manipulation and hegemonic force. "Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor." When you actually start to believe that the people who are under your thumb, the people who are actually making your life what it is, the people who are being oppressed, that give you access, that give you privilege, that give you status, is when you actually start to believe that there is a way that they might actually realize that God is calling them into liberation, and that God is working on their behalf to liberate them from your oppression.... you intensify their oppression. And that's what we see happens in this passage. And then the last point - empires are predicated upon a fake peace, a placebo peace. And he actually starts to talk to the Israelites about the peace and the prosperity of Egypt, but he wants to secure their peace, this oppressive peace, through violence. And we know as Christians, true peace cannot be predicated upon the violence of other people. But that's exactly what's going on in this.

First we see Pharaoh tries to deal with the problem secretly and he goes to the midwives and he says upon their birth you just killed them silently. You just you go and take the Hebrew boys and you execute them. But the text tells us because the midwives feared God more than they feared pharaoh they actually resisted. They disobeyed, they refused to be culpable within this injustice that was going on. And they say ultimately you could do whatever you have to do to me but I fear God more than I fear you. So in this first part when we see that he tries to deal with the problem silently and he's not able to. We see how resistant empires and Pharaoh type leaders are. He's not dismayed by the fact that he can't deal with it silently, he just says OK if I can't do this silently I'm just going to make it into institutional injustice. And I'm literally going to make it a law within the land every Hebrew boy must die. Injustice refuses to relinquish power at all cost and I don't think we take this seriously enough within the church. And we see that when he can't do it silently he just moves to institutional injustice. And one of the things that I think is so powerful about this is that after Pharaoh literally makes a law throughout the land all Hebrew boys must be put to death, we don't see any Israelites actually step up and say that this is immoral, we can't be a part of this, how can a law like this be passed, we're not going to abide by this legislation. You see Israelites silently being complicit, turn a blind eye and say, well that's not our kids, we don't have to worry about it. And the entire nation of people goes along with a genocidal agenda targeting a certain group of people - literally saying the Hebrews' lives don't matter. But there's no people who are willing to step up in this case except these four women.

The imperative role of women

- Moses' mom & sister engage in civil disobedience. They refuse to follow the law & instead craft a basket in which they entrust their beloved son/brother to God.
The Empire's oppression didn't cause them to lose their faith in God
- The midwives disobey Pharaoh's direct orders. They are led into sedition because of their fear of God.
They ultimately feared God more than they did the empire.
- Pharaoh's daughter sees the basket in the sea & upon finding out that it is a Hebrew, she has compassion, as opposed to apathy or hatred. She orders Moses to be drawn from the water, nursed back to health, & then adopts him as her own son.
She lived into her convictions in the very heart of the empire.

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And I think it's so important that I highlight this because a lot of times when we talk about scripture and we talk about biblical heroes we talk about men and we overlook the fundamental role of faithful women throughout Scripture. And in this passage, in a patriarchal society, we see no men who are willing to step up to stand up to Pharaoh. We see no men who are actually willing to call out the injustice. We see four women who actually resist this imperial decree, and I think the most profound thing about this is that we see women across the spectrum. We see two women where it makes sense. We think, Moses' mom, of course she's going to resist. Who's going to want to put their kid to death? Even though there probably were some women who acquiesced to the law and said - I have no power, I have no choice, I have to do it. But we see his mom resists. And then we also see his sister resists. But then there's two other players in the story that don't make as much sense. So we see the midwives who at this time, socially, would have been some of the most marginalized insignificant women within the law. And we see these Hebrew midwives willing to actually stand up and actually resist this imperial decree from Pharaoh. They're willing to tell the most powerful man in the country: I refuse to do what you tell me to do because ultimately I fear God more than after you. So profound. But then I think the person that gets most overlooked within this passage, and the person I want to spend some time unpacking the significance of her resistance is Pharaoh's daughter.

When we think about this think about the level of toxicity and bigotry and hatred that his daughter had to be exposed to growing up her entire life. She literally has been disciplined, informed, and shaped by the person who actually makes the law that says all Hebrew boys must be executed. But in the midst of all of that indoctrination, she actually comes into this point when she encounters Moses and she even has the knowledge, according to the text, she thinks, it's a Hebrew boy, so she knows what she should do. There will always be this connection that she's made. She refuses to do what her father has made into a law and she actually sees herself as inherently connected to this other person. She sees somebody else made in the image of God and the Spirit of God compels her to actually override mentally all of the bigotry and toxicity that she had been disciplined to live into and she actually spares his life.

So I think this passage is so profound because it speaks to the power of God in that Moses' mom was completely powerless in this situation. She tries to subvert the system and raise him within the household as long as she can, but then ultimately gets to the point where she can no longer hide. And at that point all she has the choice to do is to say that I believe that God is really who God says God is. God will save and protect my child and not only she has to put together this basket and literally put her son into the basket, into the water, and trust that God is who God says God is. Anything could've happened to Moses! Moses could have tipped over into the water and drowned. Moses could have been eaten by a sea creature Moses could have

been picked up by a pedophile. Moses could have been picked up by a person who sells him into slavery the same way that we see with Joseph. But the power of God faithfully navigates Moses through the Nile and literally takes him to the most ironic place that he could have went. Moses literally can only find refuge in the house in which the decree comes from that he must be put to death. And this speaks to the profundity of God's power in that you would think that that would be the place where Moses would be executed. But literally that's the only place where Moses can actually find refuge. And I think what's more powerful even than that is that when you press into what Pharaoh's daughter actually puts on the line identifying with this marginalized person, I think we don't take seriously everything that she risked in identifying with Moses.

So think about this: the most powerful man in the country — if word gets out that his own daughter won't listen to him ... Pharaoh literally loses all his power. So in identifying with him she could have actually been expelled from her house, she could have been kicked out. She could have been cut off from all of her generational inheritance. Everything that she had known as normal, all the comfort, all the luxuries, all the access that being Pharaoh's daughter had, she was willing to put on the line because of the Spirit of God troubling her heart and actually helping her to understand that she was inherently connected to this person that she was disciplined to see as estranged from herself.

And I think when we think about the depth of what she was willing to sacrifice in this moment because she saw somebody else made in the image of God, I think that this passage has to call us to reflect on the way in which we've been disciplined, the way that we disciple our young people, even. In this passage we see not only the Spirit of God leads people to lie but we also see the Spirit of God lead people to break the law. When we talk about these passages to our kids we do this kind of traditional form of evangelical discipleship where we always talk about how we must always obey the law, respect authority figures, and we should never lie. And also, we have to honor our parents. All those things are true, but it's ironic that this passage literally calls all of those things not to be true in this story (laughter) so I think it's really interesting. For me, if anything happens from anything that I do, what I want to do is to help Christians read the Bible better and read the Bible more faithfully. There's this way in which we can come up with this narrative and we make these absolute claims that aren't biblically rooted. I want us to press into the text because the text actually helps us to understand when we find ourselves in moments like we have today or moments that we talked about last night when injustice is overtly obvious. Christians have historically turned a blind eye and said, I can't get engaged because I must submit to earthly authorities. And that's not what the Bible actually calls us to. I

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want to read a quote from my book because I give it a more full treatment there than what I can do off the top of my head, so I want to read a couple quotes:

“From an early age, most Christians are taught that laws provide structure and healthy communities ordering society by providing ethical standards and social accountability. We grow up resolute in our belief that laws are solely intended to protect, govern, and provide social stability. We are trained to see them as inherently linked, therefore it is only natural for us to wed law to order. However, what happens when the law does not provide structure necessary for communities to thrive? How do we make sense of the law when it actually does the inverse? When laws disproportionately create and sustain injustice, oppression, and immorality in certain communities? While most of the church has been taught to view the law in exclusively positive ways, history illustrates that laws are not always just, nor are they implemented only to aid societal flourishing. The reality is that we live in a nation of legislative fluidity where the law has functioned in both positive and negative ways. It has both guarded and violated the sanctity of human life. When the church is unable to acknowledge these contradictions, it loses its social credibility, particularly within communities that have born the weight of legislative injustice.

Given the fallen nature of humanity and the fact that fallible people govern institutions, organizations, and structures systems are susceptible, if not prone, to distortion and corruption. Therefore, how are Christians to live and view the law? Is it fateful for us to assume that law creates order categorically? These questions are complete complicated because much of Western theology endorses a blind allegiance to Law and Order, citing Romans 13:1-7. But other Christians subscribe to Augustine logic which professes an unjust law is no law at all.”

Empires pacify their loyal citizens

- I. Empires pacify their citizens; intoxicating the masses into submission to injustice & compliance with the status quo by giving faithful citizens exclusive access & privileges.
- II. Access to, and possession of, imperial assets fosters division; creating a sliding scale between the haves and the have nots. Those who have soon realize that they have a vested interest in the sustention & maintenance of imperial stability. The privileged population thereby becomes imperial ambassadors of the status quo.
- III. Whenever empires fear they are losing power, or influence, they use intimidation & produce propaganda to demonize a targeted group.
- IV. When one has access, privilege, & comfort within the confines of the empire, it becomes extremely difficult to divest oneself from it.
- V. When the empire is understood as the source of safety, security, & abundant life, it becomes an idol; weather consciously or subconsciously. Idolatry is anything that we give ourselves to other than God.

And so, I'm going to come back to this in a minute but I think that this helps us to actually start to think about how we teach our children about passages like this. And how, because we only reduce this story to a childlike story that produces childlike faith, we never come back to this story as adults and actually press into how this story helps us to learn how we're supposed to navigate the world, in the midst of worldly empires, as people who have a citizenship to another kingdom. And in that, let's point again to all of the manifestations of oppression that the Israelites saw before their own eyes but again, they turned a blind eye. And I think this is critically important for us because we live in a nation where we've seen the same kind of systemic injustice. The same kind of institutional racism. And yet time and time again we have turned a blind eye or our silence has made us complicit. And we talked about last night the history and legacy of this within the African American community, but I think it's critical for us to realize that this is not just something that's happened to black people. This is something that has happened categorically across the board to people of color and other marginalized communities. And when empires actually start to produce propaganda, it's always propaganda targeted at vulnerable communities. Their propaganda starts to make the citizenry believe if it weren't for those people, life would be so much better. And when we start to believe this us-and-them way of thinking, things that are acceptable to do to them would never be acceptable for us. When we start to segregate and separate ourselves like that, we get injustices like the Chinese Exclusionary Act. We get Japanese internment camps, we get the Native American genocide. We get the oppression that happened to African American people that I talked about last night, where we know that from 1877 to 1950, 5,500 African Americans

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were lynched in our nation. We get the oppression that we know has been so common for LGBTQ community. We get this kind of stigmatization that allows us to actually do violence, do injustice to those people because those people are categorically different than us, and what's acceptable for them, again, would never be acceptable for us.

I think our inability to see ourselves as inherently wed, as people who are connected beyond these lines — a social stratification that the world has actually called us into — is one of the church's biggest failures. And so we're going to actually watch a quick video right now that kind of fleshes this out and talks about how proximity helps us change our disposition towards our neighbor. It's a short spoken word video from a friend of mine named Michael Bernet. He's really wrestling with this question of belonging and identity, and who we see ourselves as connected to.

[Video audio] A lot of people see justice as the most futile thing you can do with your life. Give your life completely to business and you see the money piling up. Be a health nut. Eat right, go to the gym, and your muscles will grow, your body will look good and you'll see results. But when it comes to justice, it seems like you just can't get ahead. You patch up one hole and something else rips open. You bring peace to one region and war breaks out in another. You rebuild after an earthquake and a tsunami hits. And you work, and you work, and you work and there's never any profit. There's no bank where you can store a surplus amount of justice in. Stability is never permanent. Something always tips and people always ask, is it even worth it? Though understandable, it's, quite frankly, it's ridiculous. And it rarely comes from those who are actually tired from pursuing justice and not just tired of the idea. It rarely comes from people who've labored for years and have good reason to ask it. And you know why they never ask? Those type of people become friends with those who suffered. Family. Because it's one thing to wonder if someone else's freedom is worth fighting for. But when you begin to identify with that someone else, commune with them, that's when the question is no longer worth asking. That's when it becomes offensive, even. What do you mean is it worth my time? That doesn't even deserve an answer. I don't care how long it takes, I don't care how many times you fail, I don't care how little progress is made. You never stop fighting for your own.

[Voice of Dominique Dubois Gilliard] You never stop fighting for your own. And I think that is what Pharaoh's daughter gets in this passage, that she is actually connected to this Hebrew child. This Hebrew is a part of her and in that she not only loves him from a distance, the text says that as he got older she actually adopts him into her house and takes him in as her own child. Now get this again, from the house in which the decree comes from that Moses must die, this woman has the audacity not only to save him but say I'm going to bring him in your house and raise him in your house. This is a prophetic act of resistance and we see in this that she has

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a biblical truth that the church today has failed to cling to: that we actually are connected to each other.

I had a professor in seminary who made this off-the-cuff remark where he didn't fully understand how significant what he said was, but he said everything in the world teaches us that blood is thicker than water — everything except the scriptures. The scriptures actually tell us that the baptismal waters are thicker than our ancestral bloodlines, and baptism and the spirit fundamentally reconstruct our family lineage, who we are connected to. And if we as a church were able to see each other as family across all of these lines of division that the world teaches us to abide by, and we were really willing to press into Roman 12 that tells us that we cannot be conformed to the patterns of this world but we have to be transformed by the spirit through the renewing of our minds, we would actually see each other as our family in a way that we can no longer respond to or injustice and say, oh, mass incarceration? That's a black community's problem, we don't have to worry about that. Immigration is a Hispanic issue, I don't have to worry about that. In a way in which we live today, most often we don't care about injustice until it directly impacts us. But if we truly understood ourselves a family, as inherently interconnected, we would no longer have validity to stand on when we try to respond in that way.

Scripture calls us to something radically different and in the midst of this, we get this model most profoundly from Jesus. So the notion of solidarity has become this very secular kind of rhetoric, but we see the truest manifestation of solidarity in the person of Jesus when Jesus chooses to come into the world in the Incarnation. Jesus didn't have to enter into the brokenness of our world, Jesus didn't have to take on the sin and the oppression that he ultimately bore on our behalf. But Jesus, because of the love of God, was sent into the world, and because of love we are sent into the world as the body of Christ today to choose to actually enter into struggles that the world teaches us that we don't have to. The Gospel says we don't have that option. The gospel says that we belong to each other and then, in the midst of that belonging we are called to a radically different posture in the midst of worldly empires. In this passage one of the things that's so profound and so powerful is that God sets this up so we see that the least of these, the midwives who have no social influence or power, and the person closest to power, the person closest to privilege in Pharaoh's own daughter, are all called to resist the law. They're all called to resist injustice, and the church today has failed to really articulate a theology of resistance, but in the midst of worldly empires that juxtapose what the Kingdom of God are about we are called to resistance. We are called to bear witness to something radically different, and through that resistance Scripture tells us we will form a oneness so that the world would know who God is through our ability to be one, through our ability to choose to be with people that the world disciplines us not to want to be with. When we

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live with that radical disposition in the world, scriptures tell us that in and of itself as evangelistic. People want to know who God is because of how radically different this community of Christ followers are.

I want to close by reading this one last passage and giving you a couple notes of what does this mean for us today. So I continue to pick up from where I just left off in the book. It says:

“Augustine profoundly shaped Dr King's thinking. King said we must never forget the everything Hitler did in Germany was legal. This helped him determine that one has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws, conversely one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. Moreover, King said that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for the law. King's nonviolent agitation and protest of the law frequently gets shrouded out within the church. King's theology of militant civil disobedience entailed resistance disruption when laws legitimated oppression, injustice, and death. After being arrested at the Montgomery bus boycott King wrote, “I knew that I was a convicted criminal but I was proud of my crime. It was the crime of joining my people in a non-violent protest against injustice. It was a crime of seeking to instill within my people a sense of dignity and self-respect. It was the crime of desiring for my people the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It was above all the crime of seeking to convince my people that noncooperation with evil is just as much a moral duty as cooperation with good.

So how are Christians supposed to view and respond to the law when it conflicts with God's will and desire for *shalom*? That's what's at the heart of this passage but when we reduce it down to this children's narrative that we just talk about how God miraculously saves Moses and not about what it means for us as adults, ethically and morally, to actually participate or to acquiesce to the injustice that we know is real within worldly empires, then we miss what God is trying to do in this passage. This passage is about once you come into in a revelation of the oppression, death, and injustice that stems from the empire that you that your earthly citizenship is bound to, are you willing to divest yourself from access in those benefits that come at the expense of other people's oppression? Are you willing to stand firm and live into what Bonhoeffer says is the real cost of discipleship where he says, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die.” Are you willing to die to some of the access, to some of the privilege, to some of the luxuries that we have in the U.S. empire that we know are directly connected to other people's oppression? This is a question nationalistically but this is also a question racially. When we look at this, this is about ethnocentrism. Are you willing to die to the privileges in the trinkets and the excess of whiteness in order to stand in solidarity with

oppressed people of color in this country? That's a real question and that is a question that when we don't grapple with this text appropriately, we never ask in the church.



Following Jesus amidst worldly empires means:

1. Divorcing ourselves from the patterns and logics of this world.
2. Becoming new creations who live sacrificially, putting the needs and interest, of others before our own.
3. Refusing to turn a blind eye to injustice, and speaking out to defend the integrity, dignity, and humanity of the least of these.
4. Remembering who and whose we are...where our true citizenship lies

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says it this way:
"The Church is the Church only when it exists for others...not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men [sic] of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others."

Following Jesus amid worldly empires means many things, but these are some of the four things that I parse out from this passage. It means divorcing ourselves from the patterns of the logics of this world that teach us to see ourselves as estranged from one another because the Gospel is trying to help us to understand we're inherently connected, theologically wed and baptismally connected through the body of Christ. Second, we're called to become new creations who live sacrificially, putting the needs and the interests of others before our own (Philippians 2). Third, it says we are called to refuse to turn a blind eye to injustice and to speak out and defend the integrity, dignity, and humanity of the least of these. So much of our indoctrination and our socialization in the world teaches us to see certain people as people that we don't even desire to want to be with. The Gospel calls us to interrogate that and actually say what are the forces, the teachings, the discipleship in my life that have taught me to think about them as a "them" as opposed to an "us." And then lastly, following Jesus amid worldly empires causes us to remember who in whose we are. When we remember who and whose we are and are aware of where our true citizenship lies, we're not afraid to resist worldly empires because we know that the Gospel calls us to this kind of disposition.

So I want to invite the worship team up and I'll pray for us as we try to envision what it looks like to live into this prophetic call of the gospel. God, I'd just like to thank you for giving us a

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new way to engage this text that will speak to what does it mean for us to actually make disciples who make disciples who literally are willing to pay the cost of discipleship of picking up their crosses on a daily basis to bear witness to your kingdom amid worldly empires that are actually trying to counteract your kingdom. Give us the fortitude and the love and the perseverance to walk the narrow road, as enticing as the wide world might be. Help your spirit to give us co laborers to walk this journey with and to actually encourage us when it gets discouraging because the cost is real, the sacrifice is real, and it's inconvenient. But I pray that you give us everything that we need to sustain our faith on this journey in the call that you have had on our lives, in your name we pray. Amen.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Would you join you me in thanking Dominique Gilliard (applause). We're going to take communion and are go right into Psalm 130 and invite you to come see the sacrament of grace offered here that puts us around the table with each other which makes us into a family, family of God no matter who we are or where we come from. If you'd like to receive personal prayer there will be a member of the prayer team at the back of the room be happy to pray with you during this time. So let's sing one more song together, you can go ahead and stand together as you're able and this will be our last song.

[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at ArtisanChurch.com