



8/24/2014

The Butterfly Effect

Exodus 1:8-2:10



Pastor Brad

What if I were to tell you that what you do this week could change the world? Would you believe me? Would you smile politely and nod your head, but secretly say to yourself, “Yeah, right.” Maybe you’ll stand a little taller and feel that little bounce in your step when you walk down the street. You know that feeling.... In fact, I wish that all my sermons could make you feel like that.

Two women made a decision once, thousands of years ago they took a chance, and they changed the world. It was a small gesture but at the same time it was a truly heroic act. They disobeyed. I think this is the first recorded instance of intentional civil disobedience in history – at least, in the Bible! And Because of their act of disobedience God was able to rescue all of Israel from oppression.

Now, there are a lot of truly remarkable women in the Bible. Eve, Esther, Delilah, Ruth & Naomi, Hagar, Jezebel, Elizabeth (John the Baptists mom), Mary of course, and Mary. Martha and the other Mary, OK that’s just kind of funny... But these two women are hardly ever mentioned. Most people have never heard of them and if it weren’t for them the Hebrews could very well have perished before they ever had to wander in the desert for 40 years.... Shiphrah and Puah are their names and it’s kind of a shame that we don’t know them better, because like most everyone in the Bible, they, too, have something to teach us.

Exodus picks up about 400 years after Joseph invited all his brothers and their families to come and live with him in Egypt, where they would live as honored guests because Joe was such a big cheese in Egypt. There’s a new Pharaoh in town and he’s not very friendly toward the Hebrews and had no real concern for their welfare. Of course we have to remember that the original family of about 70 had followed Gods command, were fruitful and multiplied. Verse 7 says “...they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.”

Pharaoh might have been right to be a little concerned when he noticed that the Israelites were “more numerous and powerful than we are!” Egypt had had some troubles over the last centuries – foreign invaders had occupied the eastern part of the country forcing Egypt to adopt a more war-like attitude than before. Captured invaders were put into forced labor, probably for certain large building projects, I would assume. Clearly Pharaoh had to do something, so in a rather paranoid move he began to made life miserable for them. Better they be in chains than joining up with the enemy, right?

Now this is starting to sound familiar – like I’ve seen this movie before. A ruler, wanting to solidify his political base, identifies a common enemy – a scapegoat to blame for whatever the current problems are plaguing society. In the thirties, it was the Jews. More recently it’s been undocumented immigrants, welfare moms, gays, Muslims, the ‘undeserving’ poor... Why is it that the way we define ourselves is by comparison to others, finding them somehow ‘less than’ and then in the process denying them their humanity – their undeniable status as beloved

children of God? This time around it's the ancient Israelites. I must say the Jews have really gotten the shaft all through history...

They get fingered by a ruler who has completely forgotten that for generations the people he's naming as possible terrorists were considered allies – honored guests. When turning them into slave labor doesn't work, he gets downright mean. He tells the midwives Shiphrah and Puah to kill all the baby boys that they deliver. Scholars aren't sure if the midwives were Hebrew or not. The translation is awkward – they could be the Hebrews' midwives, or they could be the midwives of Hebrews. Either way, they refuse. They do not kill the boys. It's ironic that it's the girls were of no concern to Pharaoh, when in fact it was five women - these two midwives, then Moses mother and sister, and Pharaoh's own daughter were his undoing. The midwives lie outright to Pharaoh, and tell him that the Hebrew women are so vigorous that their babies are delivered before they can get to them. Yeah right.

Well, he bought it, and this courageous act of civil disobedience changes history. One of the boys that was spared will be Moses – and the rest, as they say, is history. He will lead the Israelites out of Egyptian captivity, he will deliver God's law to them – and to us! – and he will bring them to the promised land. And it all starts right here, with these two peaceful protestors – these brave women practicing a little civil disobedience, saying 'no' to an act of injustice. I doubt that they thought they were changing the world. As we doubt that we might be changing the world. But they were – by being faithful and following the dictates of their hearts.

In 1963, Edward Lorenz presented a hypothesis to the NY Academy of Science. Simply stated, "A butterfly could flap its wings and set molecules of air in motion, which in turn would move other molecules of air, in turn moving more molecules of air, eventually capable of starting a hurricane on the other side of the planet. Perhaps you've heard of it – the so-called Butterfly Effect.

Lorenz and his ideas were literally laughed out of the conference. His proposal was ridiculous -- preposterous! But it was so fascinating, so intriguing, that this 'Butterfly Effect' became a staple of science fiction. It was popularized by Ray Bradbury in a story published 11 years earlier called "The Sound of Thunder."

It's the year 2050 on the eve of an American presidential election, and a party of rich businessmen go on a time travel safari to the past to hunt dinosaurs. While the organizers have taken every precaution to minimize the impact of these hunting parties on the past, one member breaks the rules and leaves the designated path. When they return to the present the group finds that the world has been drastically altered by the seemingly insignificant death of a pre-historic butterfly, crushed on the bottom of the man's boot.

For years this theory remained an interesting myth. In the mid-1990s, though, physics professors from several universities, working together, proved that the butterfly effect was accurate, and worked every time.

In 2010, speaker and author Andy Andrews, wrote a clever and inspirational little book called “The Butterfly effect in which he catalogues the remarkable impact of certain simple and courageous acts. The interesting thing about it is that when we look back we can’t tell which efforts made the biggest impact.

Let me see if I can give you an example:

Norman Borlaug, biologist, humanitarian and Nobel laureate, developed high yield, disease resistant corn and wheat, and has been called ‘the man who save a billion lives.’ That’s ‘billion’ with a ‘b’. BUT, Henry Wallace, the one-term US vice president created the office in Mexico for the purpose of developing hybrid seed for dry climates. Wallace hired Borlaug to run it. Maybe he should get the credit.

But wait – George Washington Carver used to take long walks in the fields around Iowa State College to study plants for research. On some of these walks he brought along the six-year-old son of one of the science professors. That boy was Henry Wallace.

But – Moses and Susan Carver adopted an orphan and named him George Washington. Or art professor Etta May Budd who encouraged George not to just paint plants but to study them. Or – you get the idea. Andrews draws our attention to just how interconnected our actions really are, creating a butterfly effect that ripples across time and space, affecting millions – billions – of lives.

The point of Andy Andrews little book? And this long-winded sermon? Your life matters. You matter. Your actions and your words all matter. You. Are. Important. I mean, who knows? You teachers – I don’t have to tell you what a difference you make. The things we do – even the smallest things -- really matter.

The things we do this week – our actions, decisions, choices – will ripple out with consequences both foreseen and unforeseen, good or bad, for the health or damage of the world. What we do this week WILL make difference, one way or another. Maybe it’ll be big; or maybe it’ll be small and unnoticed; but everything we do has the potential to ripple out, and affect countless lives.

In today’s reading it’s Shiphrah and Puah, standing up to a bully and a tyrant. It’s Miriam, Moses’ sister who happens to be in the right place at the right time. It’s Pharaoh’s daughter picking a cute little Hebrew baby out of the river. Shiphrah and Puah are agents of God’s hope, delivering hope to the world, one baby at a time. How is God calling you to bring

hope to the hopeless; or strength to the weak? How is he calling to intervene when there is injustice or to be a voice for the voiceless?

Let me finish with a story:

There was a high school freshman who saw a kid from his class walking home from school. We'll call him Kyle. It looked like Kyle was carrying every book he owned. "What a nerd!" thought the freshman, "Who takes all their books home on a Friday afternoon?"

As he watched, a bunch of kids ran toward Kyle, knocked all the books out of his arms and tripped him so he landed in the dirt. His glasses went flying, and when he looked up there was this terrible sadness in his eyes. The freshman jogged over, and as Kyle crawled around looking for his glasses, the boy saw a tear in his eye. As he handed him his glasses, he said, "Those guys are jerks. They really should get lives." Kyle looked up and said, "Hey thanks!" And smiled.

The two boys pick up Kyle's books, and as it turned out, they lived near each other. Kyle said he had gone to private school before now, and was new to public school. They talked all the way home.

Over the next four years, the two boys became best friends. Kyle became valedictorian of the class. He was one of those guys that really found himself during high school. He filled out and actually looked good in glasses. He had lots of dates and all the girls loved him.

At graduation Kyle had to give a speech of course, and as Kyle started his speech, he cleared his throat, and began. "Graduation is a time to thank those who helped you make it through those tough years -- parents, teachers, siblings, maybe a coach...but mostly your friends... I am here to tell all of you that being a friend to someone is the best gift you can give them. I am going to tell you a story." The audience grew quiet as he told the story of the day he met his best friend.

Kyle had planned to kill himself over the weekend. He talked of how he had cleaned out his locker so his Mom wouldn't have to do it and was carrying his stuff home. He looked hard at his friend and gave him a little smile. "Thankfully," Kyle said, "I was saved. My friend saved me from doing the unspeakable."

Never underestimate the power of your actions. They matter. You matter.

Amen