

Sermon by Rev. Allison J. Beaulieu  
Glenshaw Presbyterian Church  
July 8, 2007

## **How Deep is Your Love?**

Today's sermon may be a little different than the ones you are used to hearing. It is different in two ways. First of all, this sermon retells two Old Testament stories by juxtaposing them. In other words, I retell a portion of one story and then jump to the other story and retell a portion of that. I flip-flop between the two texts throughout the sermon. This juxtaposition of the two stories is designed to allow you see the parallels, and at times, the contrasts in these texts. I will pause when I switch from story to story so that you know I am making a transition. The second reason this sermon is a little different is that I do not tell you how these stories are applicable to your daily life. In my sermons, I usually do all I can to make the scripture relevant to today's world but today I'm going to challenge you to take that next step. You may want to ask yourself, "How do these stories proclaim the good news of the gospel? How do they reflect God in Jesus Christ? And, how do these stories relate to my life?" With that said, I ask that you please pray with me.

*"O God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen."*

**When the Lord asked Solomon, "What should I give you?" Solomon said "Give your servant an understanding mind to govern your people—an ability to discern between good and evil." Solomon, pure and simple, asked for wisdom. It was not a selfish request, but an altruistic one. He wanted to govern the people of Israel in a fair and just way, and the Lord was pleased with Solomon's response. Therefore God gave Solomon a wise and discerning mind and a listening heart, such was never seen before in an Israelite King.**

Pharaoh was a tyrant—shrewd and manipulative. As soon as he began his rule over Egypt, he was preoccupied with the Israelite people. Pharaoh worried that the Israelites would continue to increase in number and then one day rise up against the Egyptian rule and overthrow them. Because of his fear, Pharaoh oppressed the Israelites and forced them into slave labor. Still anxious about their growing numbers, Pharaoh issued a decree that every baby boy born to the Hebrews shall be thrown into the Nile and drowned. Yet even out of this decree of death came life. And a baby boy named Moses was born.

**Solomon's gift of wisdom was precisely the reason why two women in conflict approached him to settle a dispute. The two of them had been living together in a house. More than likely, these two women lived together out of necessity and not out of friendship. Because they were prostitutes, neither of them could afford their own house and this arrangement provided perhaps the best alternative. One of the women was just a few years older than the other. She was the one who bore her son first. It was her first child and she often sat amazed at the little miracle that she held in her arms. She could hardly believe that this was her own flesh and blood. She felt inadequate to care for this new human being at first, but slowly she began to mature into her role. She held the baby often, told him stories, and sang lullabies before he went to sleep at night. She began to intuit when he was hungry or needed changed or when he was just cranky and tuckered out from a long day. She couldn't believe how much love she felt for this human being entrusted to her care. It was a love she couldn't explain with words. It far surpassed any human language. Perhaps it could only be described by the language of the heart.**

Moses was a beautiful baby. When his mother first saw him, she knew he was a fine baby. The way she looked at him was like God looking at creation at the end of the sixth day... in awe, amazement, and a deep sense of satisfaction. She knew of the decree that Pharaoh issued—the one that put a death sentence to all baby boys born to the Hebrews. But, she defied the decree and hid her baby boy for three months. In that time, a bond formed between them that could not be broken. Although she has borne other

children, there was something about Moses that seemed so special. When she looked in his big brown eyes, she saw something like a promise—a promise of freedom and liberation. And so she found herself, a woman enslaved, with a child of freedom. Yet she loved the child so much more than freedom itself. She decided right then to do anything she could to keep her baby alive.

**Three days after the older woman gave birth; her housemate gave birth, also to a boy. After the babies were born, the house became chaotic. When one baby stopped crying, the other one began. The house was in disarray. There was not enough room and the two women often vied for resources. The stress and tension between the two women began to mount until one fateful night. The younger woman, the one who bore her child three days after the other woman, had a restless sleep. You probably are familiar with the kind of sleep she had—the kind where you’re half awake and half delirious. The woman was having difficulty distinguishing what was real and what was a concoction of her dream state. In her delirium, she forgot that she had nestled her newborn son right beside her in the bed. So when she finally awoke with a clear mind and reached for her child, she found him limp and not breathing. It only took her a few seconds to realize that she had unknowingly laid upon him and smothered him to death. What was she to do? In her panic, mortification, and utter desperation, she ran to the older woman’s room. She carefully picked up the baby that was lying beside the sleeping woman and replaced it with her own baby. In the morning, when the unassuming woman awoke, she saw the dead baby lying beside her. Startled and in disbelief, she looked at it closely. Having gazed into her son’s face over a million times, she knew the face she was looking at was not his. She went to find the other woman in the house and when she did, the younger woman was holding her baby! The woman shouted, “Give my son back to me!” The younger woman replied, “He’s not your son; he’s mine.” The older woman was not about to give up her son like that, and so she took the dispute to the King. She was willing to do anything she could to keep her baby.**

After three months, Moses' mother slowly came to the realization that she was not going to be able to keep her son. As much as she tried to hide him from the Egyptian authorities and from her own neighbors, his cries became too loud. People began to suspect that there was a baby in the house and people in power began asking questions. She knew that as long as Moses lived in her house, his life would be in danger. And so, she decided to set him free. She carefully weaved a basket of papyrus reeds and filled the basket with a soft blanket. Resisting her inclination to hold onto her son for dear life, she placed him in the basket. She then carried the basket to the Nile and set him afloat among the reeds on the banks of the river. With hope in her heart and a prayer on her lips, she stood on the side of the river and watched her baby being carried by the current.

**The older woman pleaded with King Solomon, trying to persuade him to rule in her defense. She said, "Wise King, this is my child, not hers. She stole him from me after she accidentally killed her own son. This boy is my son!" But, every effort she made to claim her child as her own, the younger woman made a claim for herself, thus confusing the issue before the King. The lack of witnesses surely did not help and the women's poor reputation made it even more difficult to render a decision. But, using his gift of wisdom, Solomon devised a plan. He announced that he would cut the child in half and divide him among the women. So he called for his servant to bring him a sword.**

Moses' mother's effort to keep him from Pharaoh's sword was successful. Pharaoh's daughter found Moses and had compassion for him. Moses' sister, who followed the basket down the river, asked the woman if she wanted a Hebrew woman to nurse the child. The woman agreed. So, Moses' sister ran back to her mother and told her what had happened—that Pharaoh's daughter found Moses and wanted to raise him as her own but that she needed a Hebrew woman to nurse him. Moses' mother traveled to see Pharaoh's daughter and offered to nurse the child. Pharaoh's daughter accepted and gave the boy to his real mother.

**The servant placed the child on a stone table right in front of the kind. The servant carefully handed Solomon the sword. He touched the edge of it to feel its sharpness. Indeed, the sword was sharp as it drew a tiny bright red drop of blood from the tip of his finger. Looking from one woman to the other, he raised the sword high above the baby's head. Suddenly the older woman, the real mother screamed, "Please my Lord, let the other woman have the living boy. Just do not kill him." When Solomon realized the mother had set her baby free so that it could remain alive, he knew how to render a decision. He picked up the baby boy and gave him to his real mother. "Surely," he said, "this is your child."**

And so two women of God, rejoiced in thanksgiving, for they had given up their sons, only to have gotten them back. Amen.