

(PP1) Exodus 1:8-2:10

“God in Quiet Mode”

Many centuries ago, the Prophet Isaiah declared, “Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior.” (Isaiah 45:15) Since then, many people in every generation have had the same thought, and some have taken it to a further conclusion: that God does not exist at all.

The Bible, however, never goes there; in fact, it regards those who say there is no God as “fools.” (see Psalm 14:1; 53:1). Nonetheless, the Bible acknowledges that sometimes God can be difficult to perceive in the midst of troubled situations. But is this really God *hiding* himself?

Scott Hoezee, on staff at Calvin Theological Seminary, suggests a different way to characterize God’s activity, when God seems to be absent in our times of trouble. Commenting on Pharaoh’s oppression of the ancient Hebrews, and the killing of their male infants, Hoezee says, “Pharaoh creates terror, while God seems to provide no comfort to help his people, in the midst of this mini-holocaust. Yet, God is there after all. He is in quiet mode, contently working behind the scenes through ordinary means of reproduction and birth.”

Hmmm. God in quiet mode. That suggests not so much God being *hidden as being unobtrusive*. What is “quiet mode?” Well, here is a modern-day example: “QM” is a function of the Norton AntiVirus program for computers. It has a “quiet mode” that refers not to *absence* or *hiddenness*, but to *a suspension of certain activities*.

When you are using your computer to perform tasks that require higher utilization of your system resources, Norton automatically suspends the background activities’ and allows the task to use the maximum system

resources for better performance. Still, while working in “quiet mode,” the Norton program does not *cease to function*.

Now, think about “God, working in quiet mode” in our Scripture lesson for today. Between the close of Genesis and the opening of Exodus, a great change in fortunes has occurred for the descendants of Jacob. At the close of Genesis, Jacob’s 12 sons and their families are living in Egypt as welcome immigrants. One of Jacob’s sons, Joseph, is Pharaoh’s right-hand man, holding an honored and responsible position high in Egypt’s government.

(PP2) But at least 400 years go by between the end of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus, and, in that time, Jacob’s descendants have grown numerous. They prosper and grow strong in both numbers and financial dealings. Over those same years, various pharaohs have come and gone on Egypt’s throne, and, by the time Exodus opens, another king has risen to power over Egypt, who of course, did not know Joseph.

This particular pharaoh felt no obligation to honor an ancient promise of hospitality to the Hebrews made by one of his predecessors. This pharaoh, in fact, sees Jacob’s descendants as a potential threat to Egypt. The Hebrews have not done anything threatening; except that they multiplied and “filled the land.”

The Egyptian king sees their very numbers as dangerous and suggests that, in the event of a war, the Hebrews might side with Egypt’s enemies, or they might escape from Egypt, taking with them a significant labor force.

Asserting his power over the Hebrews, Pharaoh introduces chaos into their lives. He enslaves them, putting them to work on massive government building projects. The Hebrews did the work, but they also continued to multiply.

This leads Pharaoh to call in two Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, and he instructs them to let baby girls live, but to kill all baby boys. The midwives, however, “fear God” more than they fear Pharaoh, and they ignore his directive.

Unfortunately, Pharaoh is not to be stopped, and he gives orders for the Egyptian populace to seek out all male Hebrew children and drown them in the Nile River. The Bible doesn’t record how many boys were killed during that time, but the threat sets the stage for the birth of Moses, whose mother hid him in a basket, placing it in the Nile River among the reeds. It is this Moses who eventually becomes the deliverer of the Hebrew people.

Now, there is great irony in this story. Pharaoh’s target was male children. He evidently assumed that females were no threat. He completely fails to see that two Hebrew women, the midwives, have defied him and saved many children. He doesn’t realize that it will be a Hebrew woman, the mother of Moses, who will foil his plans with a simple woven basket.

Pharaoh doesn’t know that it will be a Hebrew girl, Moses’ sister Miriam, who will have the savvy to propose to Pharaoh’s daughter, who discovers the child in the river, that Moses’ actual mother should be employed as a wet nurse for him – and get paid for doing it!

Pharaoh apparently doesn’t even realize that his own daughter, an Egyptian woman, has saved a Hebrew baby – and this particular baby will grow up to undo Pharaoh’s designs to enslave the Hebrew people.

**(PP3)** So, where is God in all of this? If we read today’s Scripture lesson with an eye for the work of God, we see that *God is not much mentioned*. Other than the comment that the midwives “feared God,” and that God gave them families, God is apparently absent from the

action of this story. However, that is not really the case, is it? God is there in the prosperity and growth of the Hebrew people. God is operating – you might say – in quiet mode.

The comment that the midwives feared God also tells us that God was active in the birth of the children, and it sets us up to understand that, when Moses is born, something momentous from God has happened. On the one hand, it's an ordinary birth. No angel announces it. There is no statement of Moses being chosen before his birth to be the Deliverer of Israel. There are no special instructions in a dream to Moses' parents.

Yet when Moses' mother plots to keep him alive, she sets him afloat on the very river in which the Egyptians were drowning the male children they found. What was she thinking? What prompted her to choose that place to hide her baby? Who worked it out that the Egyptian who found the baby was not only a woman of power and wealth, but also one kindhearted enough to ignore her own father's command?

She clearly recognized that the baby was a Hebrew, and she could have easily tipped the basket over and drowned the baby. But instead, she takes the baby into her own household, to raise as her own son. Can we *really* think for long that God was *not* active in all that was going on to build up and rescue the people of Israel? No, God was working in “quiet mode.”

Later in the story of Moses, we see God working in “active mode,” speaking through a burning bush, inflicting plagues on the Egyptians, leading Israel with a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud, and parting the Red Sea. But in our experience, says Hoezee, God's quiet activity, as in Exodus 1 and 2, is more typical of God, than the spectacular displays that come later in the story.

No doubt the Israelites would have liked the spectacular stuff sooner, or would have preferred God in “active mode” earlier in the story, before things got so bad. Like the Israelites struggling under Pharaoh, we, too, may wonder why God lets us get so deep into the messes of life, and doesn’t intervene.

It is often beyond our ability to explain why God chooses the timing that God does. Even when we intentionally look with the “eyes of faith” for God at work, it is often difficult to discern the activity of God in troubled times. (PP4) Yet, our faith influences how we interpret God to be at work in our world.

You are no doubt familiar with the expression I’ve already used: “working behind the scenes.” The phrase suggests that if something is going on “behind the scenes,” it is happening secretly, especially when something else is happening publicly. “Working behind the scenes” is activity that is done quietly, in a way that does not attract attention – as in a stagehand working quietly off the set to ensure the performance goes smoothly.

“God in Quiet Mode” is God working “behind the scenes,” and although He is hidden from view, He is quietly working so that our “performance” might be the best possible. God is working so that we have everything we need to succeed, even when the performance we are called to may be one of incredible suffering. Of course, we need to know our lines, and be ready to perform, right!?

Faith believes that God is not only active in the most ordinary of circumstances, as well as troubled ones, but in fact, God working in “quiet mode” is his most common way of affecting our world. God works in quiet mode through people who, like the midwives, trust themselves to God, more than they trust the powers of the world itself.

**(PP5)** So, is God active in our lives today? Is God working in quiet mode to allow us to have full access to resources that will help us deal with whatever comes our way? Is God working “behind the scenes” through the lives of his people, to bring about his will in the world?

**(PP6)** This old story from Exodus tells us, the answer is “Yes, Absolutely.” Don’t forget that in the midst of your trials and struggles, and be sure to thank God often for His faithfulness in your lives. May God bless you all, Amen.

***Benediction*** - Friends, as you go from this place to live your busy lives, remember that God is with you. In the busyness of your days, breathe deeply of God's grace and love. Seek God in the stillness of your soul and you will find God there. Go forth therefore in joy! Amen.

***Calls to Worship*** - We gather for worship in this sacred space away from the noise and busyness, and the demands of our everyday lives. Open our hearts to receive your peace, O Lord, and let our souls be still. With gratitude for this place of refuge and peace, we lift up our voices to sing God's praise!

### ***Litany***

Leader: Our lives are filled with clutter. Let us resolve to de-clutter our lives of material things.

People: Let us donate tools we never use to Habitat for Humanity, dishes gathering dust in our cupboards to veteran groups, clothes our children have outgrown and toys they no longer play with to homeless shelters.

Leader: Let us resolve to de-clutter our lives of trivia.

People: Let us concentrate on our work and avoid the distraction of our iPods. Let us interact with each other face-to-face, not only on Facebook. Help us to find an appropriate balance between homework and video games.

Leader: Let us resolve to de-clutter our lives of negative thoughts.

People: Let us go to our jobs with a positive attitude, alert to the possibilities of the day. Let us use our energy for positive thinking and friendly thoughts of those we encounter in our daily life.

All: In the cleared-out spaces, let there be openness and space for God to come in.

### **Hymns**

I'll Praise My Maker while I've Breath

Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart

Breathe on Me, Breath of God

## *Sermon Notes*

Exodus 1:8-2:10

### “God in Quiet Mode”

- The Prophet Isaiah declared, “Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior.” (Isaiah 45:15) Since then, many people in every generation have had the same thought, and some have taken it to a further conclusion: that God does not exist at all.
- The Bible says that those who say there is no God are “fools.” (see Psalm 14:1; 53:1). The Bible also acknowledges that sometimes God can be difficult to perceive in the midst of troubled situations. But is this really God *hiding* himself?
- In our Scripture lesson, Pharaoh creates terror, while God seems to provide no comfort to help his people, in the midst of this mini-holocaust. Yet, God is there after all. He is in quiet mode, contently working behind the scenes through ordinary means.
- “God in quiet mode” suggests not so much God being *hidden as being unobtrusive*. Now, think about “God, working in quiet mode” in our Scripture lesson for today.
- It is often beyond our ability to explain why God chooses the timing that God does. Even when we intentionally look with the “eyes of faith” for God at work, it is often difficult to discern the activity of God in troubled times. Yet, our faith influences how we interpret God to be at work in our world.
- “Working behind the scenes” is activity that is done quietly, in a way that does not attract attention. “God in Quiet Mode” is God working “behind the scenes,” and although He is hidden from view, He is quietly working so that our “performance” might be the best possible.
- Faith believes that God is not only active in the most ordinary of circumstances, as well as troubled ones, but in fact, God working in “quiet mode” is his most common way of affecting our world.
- Is God active in our lives today? This old story from Exodus tells us, the answer is “Yes!”

***May God bless you!***



**Exodus 1:8-2:10**

8 Eventually, a new king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done. 9 He said to his people, "Look, the people of Israel now outnumber us and are stronger than we are. 10 We must make a plan to keep them from growing even more. If we don't, and if war breaks out, they will join our enemies and fight against us. Then they will escape from the country.\*" 11 So the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves. They appointed brutal slave drivers over them, hoping to wear them down with crushing labor. They forced them to build the cities of Pithom and Rameses as supply centers for the king. 12 But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more the Israelites multiplied and spread, and the more alarmed the Egyptians became. 13 So the Egyptians worked the people of Israel without mercy. 14 They made their lives bitter, forcing them to mix mortar and make bricks and do all the work in the fields. They were ruthless in all their demands. 15 Then Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, gave this order to the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah: 16 "When you help the Hebrew women as they give birth, watch as they deliver.\* If the baby is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live." 17 But because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king's orders. They allowed the boys to live, too. 18 So the king of Egypt called for the midwives. "Why have you done this?" he demanded. "Why have you allowed the boys to live?" 19 "The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women," the midwives replied. "They are more vigorous and have their babies so quickly that we cannot get there in time." 20 So God was good to the midwives, and the Israelites continued to multiply, growing more and more powerful. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. 22 Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Throw every newborn Hebrew boy into the Nile River. But you may let the girls live."

1 About this time, a man and woman from the tribe of Levi got married. 2 The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She saw that he was a special baby and kept him hidden for three months. 3 But when she could no longer hide him, she got a basket made of papyrus reeds and waterproofed it with tar and pitch. She put the baby in the basket and laid it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile River. 4 The baby's sister then stood at a distance, watching to see what would happen to him. 5 Soon Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe in the river, and her attendants walked along the riverbank. When the princess saw the basket among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it for her. 6 When the princess opened it, she saw the baby. The little boy was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This must be one of the Hebrew children," she said. 7 Then the baby's sister approached the princess. "Should I go and find one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" she asked. 8 "Yes, do!" the princess replied. So the girl went and called the baby's mother. 9 "Take this baby and nurse him for me," the princess told the baby's mother. "I will pay you for your help." So the woman took her baby home and nursed him. 10 Later, when the boy was older, his mother brought him back to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him as her own son. The princess named him Moses,\* for she explained, "I lifted him out of the water."