

# Torrey 1990

## By Dr. Roberta Hestenes

Speaker 1:

Of our Speaker, Dr. Roberta Hestenes and I quote, "Women have always had influence in the Church as mothers and teachers, models and encouragers. They've always done the work, but rarely, if ever, have been given formal power in evangelical situations." Dr. Roberta Hestenes has such power. As President of Eastern College in St. David's, Pennsylvania, she is the first woman in that position among the schools of the Evangelical Christian College Coalition. As the Activist Chairman of World Vision, she exerts power in one of the largest parachurch organizations in the world.

She is a sought after speaker and teacher. I can attest to that. As we began seeking after her many months ago to line her up for this conference, one individual who knows her very well, Robert Sealy says, and I quote, "Wherever you cut her, she bleeds evangelism and discipleship." We hope that we shall not cut her, but that we have warmed you up and prepared you for her first plenary session as we open the Word of God. Let's welcome once again, Dr. Roberta Hestenes to our platform.

Roberta Hestenes:

I'm going to read this morning from two passages of Scripture. The first one is in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian Christians. It's from chapter 10. It is a section in which Paul is talking about the Exodus event, where God rescued the people of Israel. And then he summarizes this section with these words beginning in chapter 10, verse 11. "These things happened to them as

examples and were written down as warnings for us on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall.

"No temptation has taken you except what is common to man. And God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. When you are tempted, he will provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." And then to the primary text which we find in the book of Exodus. Let me give you a few words of background as we come to this particular text. As you can hear from the passage in 1 Corinthians, the material which could be summarized in the phrase "the Exodus event" is very important in the life of the first Christians.

In fact, if you go all of the way through the New Testament, you discover again that the Bible of the earliest Christians was the Old Testament, that the Bible which Jesus read and knew by heart and quoted in the face of temptation was the Old Testament. And just as when you look at the gospel accounts, you gain some insight when you begin to understand that they do not deal equally with the events in the life of Jesus. But they deal disproportionately with the events of Holy Week, that week leading up to the Crucifixion and then the Resurrection.

And that tells you something about how important those events are in what God is doing for humankind. So when you look at the Old Testament, you find that the Exodus events also occupy a disproportionate amount of space. In fact, they take up the vast majority of the Pentateuch, carry on to the book of Joshua, are referred to again and again and again in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, then in the Psalms, over and over and over in the Major and in the Minor Prophets.

The Exodus event is that series of events through which Israel came to know herself as the called and covenant people of God. It was that set of occurrences which forever reshaped her identity and her self-understanding and her call and mission in the world. So the Exodus events are central to the Old Testament. They are critical in the New Testament, and the earliest Christians understood them in at least two ways. One is that when you look at the life of Jesus, you will see that the writers of the Gospel understood key events in the life of Jesus in the light of the Exodus.

So that, for instance, we see Jesus baptized and then led into the wilderness with Old Testament quotations showing that they saw, in the life of Jesus lived out, the model of the life of Israel and the New Testament. Christians understood their own journey in terms of the journey that the people of Israel made. Now I'm going to violate every Old Testament teachers, principals, and I'm going to give you five words, which will summarize the whole story of the Exodus event. I find it helpful. It's my own personal cheat sheet to help me know where I am in the story.

But these five words are more than words about then and there. They are also words about here and now. They not only point to what God did, they point to what God does. What are the five words or the five chapters of the Exodus event? These words help us to know our own journey. First, oppression. Oppression. The Exodus story starts with the reality of a fallen world and of evil in that world and of the people of God under the bondage of oppression.

Oppression is cruel. It is full of injustice. It holds people captive. And oppression is so horrible that people attempt to deliver themselves, and leaders come along who attempt through their own

ability and courage and action to bring deliverance. But oppression from evil cannot be lifted by human activity alone. So we see Moses when he sees oppression when he sees evil, attempts to make wrong right. But himself engages in another wrong, and oppression heightens. It does not go away as a result of His activity. So we don't deliver ourselves from bondage.

In the New Testament, we understand this is oppression under sin. That which holds every one of us hostage to that which would deny us what God intends for us, our freedom, our responsibility, our ministry, our forgiveness, our joy, our life in the world as the people of God oppression is the reality. Chapter One. Chapter two is a surprise in the human scheme of things because chapter two is deliverance. Deliverance. What people can't do for themselves, God does.

And in the act of deliverance, the children of Israel, and we, discover that God is not simply powerful and distant, but that God, in the words of Exodus 3 and 4, God hears, God sees the pain of his people, he hears their cry. He is moved with compassion, and God acts in order to deliver his people. And so the children of Israel are delivered by God out from under their oppression. And the climax point in that is when the blood is put on the doorpost and over the lintel and the angel of death passes by while the children of Israel are under the blood.

And we understand that in the New Testament is Jesus, the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world. And that which we could not do for ourselves, God, in Jesus, has done for us, and we are delivered, set free, released from bondage, no longer captive and driven. Something new has entered into our experience. Chapter Three, maybe, is some people's favorite chapter in the Exodus event. It's easily skipped over, but we find it after God has delivered the people they've

experienced, the Passover, they've gone through the sea, and when they come out on the other side.

Chapter three is celebration. Celebration. And celebration is the worship of the people of God as they rejoice in what God has done for us. And celebration is our response. When we discover that we have been set free, we are made new. Something has entered into our history that we couldn't make happen for ourselves. And so they sing and they dance and they rejoice and they celebrate. And when we come together as Christians in our times of worship and praise, they are to celebrate in response to what God has done for us.

I will never forget the morning after I gave my life to Christ as a college student, that I went to bed that night, knowing I had said yes to Jesus. I woke up the next morning with joy in my heart that I could not believe because something inside of me was new and whole and fresh and hopeful, and that's a reason to celebrate. Then the way I wish the story went would be oppression, deliverance, celebration, promised land. Isn't that the way it should happen? Isn't that sometimes what the evangelists tend to give you the impression of? "If you just accept Jesus, home free. Easygoing from now on."

But that isn't the next chapter in the story, because it goes from oppression to deliverance and celebration. And chapter four is wilderness. Chapter four is wilderness. This is the experience of the people of God. This is the experience of Jesus after he accepts baptism at the hand of John the Baptist. This is the experience of the New Testament, people of God that they celebrate, but

they move into wilderness. And what is wilderness? Wilderness has in it times of testing, times of trial, triumph of wandering. It also has in it times of celebration and refreshment and oasis.

And there are streams in the desert. But it's in the wilderness that the people of God discover more and more who God is and what it means to be a people who worship this God and what it means to have a ministry and a mission in the world. It's in the wilderness you find out what you're made of. It's in the wilderness that you learn what God can do to meet your needs when you are thirsty, when you are hungry, when you are confused and uncertain. And God is with Israel in the wilderness.

The New Testament talks about our identity as Christians, and it doesn't say to us as Christians that we are in the Promised Land. It says that we look for a city whose maker and builder is God. And on this journey at this stage, we are pilgrims. We are strangers. We are those who are learning. We are those who are being transformed. We are those who are wandering and sometimes wondering, is this ever going to be over? What is the meaning of all of this?

And then finally comes chapter five, that after wilderness, which is a very real part of the human experience, the Christian journey, knowing God's provision, God's power, God's presence finally, comes promised Land. Where we enter into the fullness of the promise that God has for us. For Israel in their human journey, it was entering into the physical Promised Land. For us in our journey, it is entering into the fullness of the reign of God. When Christ comes again and we are made like him, for we shall see him as he is. No more tears, no more weeping. Only

rejoicing. The Promised land. Five chapters: Oppression, Deliverance, Celebration, Wilderness, Promised Land. The people who live in hope for the future that God has given.

Now where does the story start? We're going to begin at the very beginning. I have no idea where your mental furniture about the Exodus got formed. I know that unlike what I'd like to believe about sophisticated study, et cetera, I know where my pictures of the Exodus came from. They came straight out of Cecil B. DeMille movies. And I know where the Exodus is centered and what the Exodus is really about. And it's about Moses, isn't it? And I even know. And maybe you have a clue as to what Moses looks like, because we have seen him, haven't we?

Once I ran into Moses in a shopping center, it was a disconcerting experience to have that happen. But my mental pictures of the Exodus have been shaped very much by those kinds of images, those kinds of movies. And I tend to think it starts with heroic action. And you see all of the movement in the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh. And that's the heart of the Exodus story. What I'd like to read you now is what the Word of God actually tells us. The Scriptures are so wonderful because you can read them your whole life and find again and again that new truth comes from these old pages that the Holy Spirit inspired and caused to be written.

Listen to the Word of God and where the Exodus story really started, it might surprise you. "A new king arose who didn't know about Joseph, and he came to power in Egypt. 'Look,' he said to his people. 'The Israelites have become much too numerous for us.'" Now, do you remember the old promise that God had made to Abraham that his descendants would be as many as the grains

of sand as the stars in the sky? The informed reader of this would hear in this complaint by the king the very fulfillment of the promise of God made to the patriarchs.

"They've become too numerous for us. Come. We must deal shrewdly with them, or they will become even more numerous. And if war breaks out, they 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 Python and Ramses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with hard labor and brick and mortar, and with all kinds of work in the field.

"In all their hard labor, the Egyptians used them ruthlessly. The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah. 'When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him. 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. Then Pharaoh gave this order to all

his people. 'Every boy that is born, you must throw into the Nile. But let every girl live.'" This is the word of God. Let us pray.

Lord, we pray that by that Holy Spirit, which caused the scriptures to be written by your inspiration and authority, that that same Holy Spirit would illumine these scriptures to us, that we might hear them, understand them and obey them through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Where does the Exodus story begin? It begins with the reality of oppression and a command given to two ordinary women. The oppression gives a pattern. It would be nice to believe that we have come so far in this world and that the world has so understood the gospel of Jesus Christ that we do not need to understand the dynamics of oppression.

But all over this world there are Christians for whom these realities are their everyday experience. In Ethiopia, Solomon, who was not a minister, a clergy person, Solomon, picked up by the Marxist authorities, thrown into prison, moved three times so that his wife and his family would not know where he was. His pastor picked up at the same time. Five years later, his pastor still unfound, probably dead. And Solomon read the story and reads the story of Exodus not as old history, but as today's reality about a month ago.

Now, maybe a little more, in the Soviet Union, where we are seeing marvelous, wonderful changes, one of the priests in the Orthodox Church who is the leader of the Renewal, who has been baptizing people right and left and proclaiming the gospel, was on his way to church early

in the morning, was set upon and murdered. The age of martyrs is not past. It is present in many parts of the world today. In Mozambique and Sudan.

In Sudan, I said goodbye two weeks ago to a former student of mine. His name is Bruce. Bruce was a college intern in our church, and Bruce is on his way to Sudan. We're in Sudan because the north does not want the rebellion in the south, which includes Christians among its members, to succeed. There has been a program for almost two years, a little longer now, of systemic starvation. And over 250,000 people have starved to death in the last year in Sudan.

When I was in Ethiopia at the heart of the last famine, one of the things that broke my heart, many things did, but one was to see the bodies of the children. Do you know that 40,000 children a day die before the age of five from malnutrition and diseases that ought not to be taking them? And do you know the brain damage that happens when malnutrition is your daily non-diet, year after year after year? And I watched these mothers in Ethiopia, where they live, because of war and injustice, on the edge of famine all of the time. And we talk about drought and it's really evil.

And the Ethiopian women wear crosses around their necks, their husbands give them to them as a wedding present. The Ethiopian people have been Christians since the very first centuries, following Jesus. And I watched them weep and I wept with them. And oppression is part of the reality in this fallen, broken, evil world that we live in and oppression has a pattern in it. And I think the Holy Spirit gave it to us in this text where we see the King, and he begins to say, We've got to do something because hypothetically, if war broke out, then they might join our enemies, then they might fight against us.

None of that is real. None of that has happened. It's all a projection in the mind of an evil king. And the people of God, the people of promise, come under oppression and bondage. And then it says they put the slave masters over them and they worked. But they kept growing. And that's something that happens to the people of God under oppression in Ethiopia. When I was talking with Solomon after he was released from prison, he told me this story. He said after the Marxist took over, they waited a couple of years before they came in on a ruthless campaign to exterminate the church.

And all over the country churches were shut down. A few were left open so that they wouldn't attract the notice of the world for the crimes that they were committing. And thousands of people were carted off to prison and some to martyrdom. But one church had been left open because it stood right in the middle of the city of Addis Ababa, and that small church had begun as people were hungry for reality and truth and love and light and hope. That church had begun to grow so that they were running four services on a Sunday morning.

And the people stood all around four deep under every window and outside the open doors so they could catch a word of the singing and the praying and the preaching. But the Church was only two blocks from party headquarters. It was a little hard to be invisible under those circumstances. And the party came, took the church over and put party--Marxist party offices inside of that building and said to themselves, you can almost see them wiping their hands and saying, we've taken care of that. No more Christians to bother us.

And Solomon told me the story of how the church had gotten ready for that. And the Church went instantly underground, and they began to form house churches and all over the country or the large city of Addis Ababa, house churches and the Deacons would go to encourage each of those fellowships. And he said, after five years of persecution, far from seeing the church destroyed, weakened, damaged, he says the church had grown more than ten times its previous size and that people were sharing the faith and teaching the faith to their children and to their neighbors and to their friends.

And he said the result of oppression has been the growth of the church. So the Israelites grew and the Egyptians came to dread them. And this is part of the pattern of oppression that those who do evil, those who commit injustice begin to fear, those that they have under their feet, those that they are oppressing. And so they made it worse. They made their lives bitter. And then the little phrase in the NIV, "they used them." People created by God are not meant to be used.

People are meant to be loved, empowered, nurtured, equipped, given justice to live in righteousness. But they used them. And then the oppression is heightened when something happened. That often happens under oppression. And that is that power commands the vulnerable to do its dirty work for it. Because what the king, what the Pharaoh wanted was to move simply from using people ruthlessly to genocide. And genocide is a reality in our world. And in genocide, he moves to two ordinary women. Now it is fascinating when you see this story, that all the way through the Exodus event, the writer does not name the pharaoh.

His name is not preserved. But the writer, under the Holy Spirit does preserve the name of these two ordinary women. Their names are Shiphrah and Puah. What do we know about them? Not too much. The scholars suggest that in all likelihood, these women were barren, because barren women became midwives in order to help other women bring forth healthy living babies. It was the way they served in the community. In all likelihood, these women were illiterate. They could not read or write because their leaders did not want them to have those abilities or those capabilities.

And in all likelihood, if you took a poll, nobody at the time would have told you that these women were significant. They were insignificant. They were ordinary women who had work to do. Their work was to nourish life and to bring life into the world. Their work was to help. Their work was to take that baby, helping the mother to bring it forth and then wiping it off to give that new life to the mother. That was their work. That's what they did every day when they got a call in the middle of the night.

That's what they went out to do, standing ready to help. And came a command to these two women. And the command was, instead of helping, you are to take the work which is yours, the work which is intended to nourish life. And you are to use your position and your responsibility and your opportunity to bring death. Instead, the command came from the most powerful person in the land whose word was absolute law. I have been to Egypt. You may have been or you have seen the temples, the columns, the structures, the might, the glory that was Egypt, the power that was in the Pharaoh, the God King.

And he sends down the order. If it's a boy, kill him. If it's a girl, well, girls are useful for servants in the household. Let them live. But ultimately, this is genocide. Destroy the people by perverting your calling. Kill them. The command goes to these women to pervert, to change their behavior. And when families look to them for help, give them death instead. Can you picture that? When the baby, which is to be lifted up and rejoiced in and handed to the mother by the midwife, is to be handed now, it's to be a dead baby.

The pressure on these women. When I was a brand new Christian, I used to think that the invitations to compromise would come in dramatic kinds of moments. "Deny Jesus or die." For most of us, for most of our lives, that isn't where the temptation comes. For most of us, it comes in the midst of our everyday lives and our everyday work. When we are tempted to engage in behaviors because those whose approval we so desperately want and need want that behavior. When we are tempted to cut corners, because those above us who have the authority and the power want the corners to be cut because there's a bottom line.

I was in Mexico City soon after the earthquake, which devastated that town. And you could see there in one of the large hotels that had collapsed, that instead of the thick rods of steel that had gone into the concrete, only very thin pieces of metal had been placed there, absolutely inadequate to the challenge. And why had that be done? Because you could only see the outside and there were more profits to be made if you cut the corner, if you cut the deal, if you increase the bottom line.

My husband is a scientist and for many years of his life, he worked at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. He's now with the National Science Foundation and at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, he was responsible for research, heart research on the astronauts. And part of what he did was research how well they hang in under stress of weightlessness and the pressures of all of that. And one day, while the equipment is all hooked up and ready to go, the Challenger blows up. Why? Well, the best they can tell in a company that wanted a bigger bottom line, that felt a lot of pressure. Engineers who knew that they needed to test the strength of the rubber and the metal and the joining together told, don't do the test or don't worry about those results. That's not your business. And people died.

And I thought about the Valdez. There is Skipper Hazelwood, and he comes on the ship and as near as we know, highly burdened with alcohol and the ship goes aground and they bring him to trial. And what I have wondered is not so much about the Skipper but about everyone else around him that knew that he had a problem and said to themselves, Well, that's not my business. Don't you go along in order to get along? Don't you do what people tell you to do?

Isn't it really their responsibility and not my responsibility? And these two women could have said, whatever power wants, power gets. And they didn't. The text is very simple and very straightforward. It says the "midwives, however" --a big "however"-- "feared God and they didn't do what the king ordered them to do."

"Feared God." The phrase begins here. It carries all the way through the scripture. What did they have in their mind? What does Moses have in his mind when the text is written that they feared

God? What did they know about God? They didn't know everything that we know in Jesus Christ in the fullness of time. God made flesh and dwelling among us. But they knew enough about God to know that you live your life in the sight of God, whether anybody is looking or not. They knew enough to know that there are powers, and there are powers and there are hierarchies, and there are hierarchies. But above all of the hierarchies, there is God.

When I first became a Christian, I had a heavy relationship going with a Caltech guy, and I had my new Christian fellowship. And in the Christian fellowship I was learning all the new songs and learning about following Jesus. And in my relationship with my Caltech Guy, I was learning about a whole lot of other things, heavily physical, lots of fun, and not right. And for months I found myself living in two realities. And I don't think I'm the only one that struggles with that, which is wanting all the blessings and the benefits in the one world and wanting all the blessings and benefits in the other world and trying to have it both ways, paying the price of pleasure and the price, the knowledge or the joy of following Jesus.

And then after a while, you realize that what Jesus said is true. You really can't serve two masters. They just tear you apart inside and you have a decision you have to make. And these two women, fearing God, said no. Said no. As we go on in Exodus, I think there are two things about God that perhaps they knew. One was that God was all powerful, that God knows, and God sees, and God holds us accountable. It is very popular today when we talk about the fear of God to immediately follow it with saying, "but it doesn't really mean fear of God. It just means being respectful."

Wrong. Jesus is not our buddy. God is the Lord to whom we give account of our lives, all of them, every aspect, every arena, every decision, everything that we're about. So they said, no. The word gets back to the King. He summons the midwives and he says, "Why have you done this?" I've pictured this in my head as these two insignificant women are taken from their slave quarters in the bad part of town, into the palace, the whole trappings of power designed to intimidate.

And they stand in front of the Pharaoh. And he says, "Give me an explanation." And then their answer, it's an incredible answer. "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women." Now, if you didn't catch it, this is an insult. What this is saying is that Egyptian women are pampered. Egyptian women are so spoiled, because they have all these servants and they have all these household appliances and they have all these things to make life easy for them. And the Hebrew women aren't like that. They're strong, they're vigorous. They're down to Earth. They don't need any help.

The only problem with that answer is if they didn't need any help, then why do they have midwives? Once I was in the Sudan and I heard a Sudanese actually say this exact same thing, says, "Our women are not like European women. They're strong, they're vigorous." I couldn't believe it. It was so interesting to hear almost the same kinds of words. But they still need midwives. What they are trying to do is to deflect the hostility of Pharaoh, and apparently they get away with it.

It's fascinating to read the commentaries and the scholars. You can go back and read 2000 years worth or more of commentaries on these passages. And all the scholars worry about is, did the Hebrew midwives lie? And is it ever appropriate to lie in a good cause? And so there are thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of pages about that. What is fascinating is it seems to me that most of the commentaries missed the major point, which is the Hebrew midwives disobeyed. Disobeyed. They said no to wrong because they feared God.

And what did God think about that? What did God think about their behavior? And the text is unambiguous. God, so the text says--consequently, God was kind to the midwives. The people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. What this text tells us is that God honored these ordinary people who in the midst of their daily work, in the midst of their circumstances, when they had the courage to do what was right, God honored them, and the people continued to increase.

And they had families of their own. I'm sure you have heard many stories of the recent events in Eastern Europe, in the Soviet Union. Wonderful stories. But one of the stories that I most appreciate is the story of Laszlo Tokes, who was a pastor in Romania, a member of a minority group within that country. And he went to this town away from the capital city. And he took a small church, a church almost impossible to find. If you stand on the street and look for it because it's underneath the sign of a tobacco shop.

And he began preaching the gospel faithfully in that church. And the Stasi, the secret police of Romania began coming to the Church because the Church had started to grow. And soon the

intelligentsia and the young leaders and the artists and young couples and older couples were coming to the church so that there was standing room only. And there was a bishop who was corrupt. And the bishop sent down a message which said, "stop preaching." And Laszlo Tokes said, "I only preach the Bible. I will continue to preach the Bible."

And so the Stasi went out and murdered an architect Christian in that church thinking that'll get the message across. And Tokes said, "Until they carry me away, I will preach the Word." And so one day the order came, which was they were going to carry him away. He was to be exiled clear across the country where nobody could follow him or find him. And his preaching could have no rebellious effect anymore. And on December the fourth, he said to his congregation, if you want to see any illegal eviction come next Sunday afternoon at 4 o'clock. That's when they're coming for me. And his congregation decided that they did want to see this. More than that, they wanted to prevent it.

And so they stood outside the church, and then people began to join them. And the crowd began [cut off] And it said that Christians from other communions came as well. And pretty soon the crowd looked suspiciously like a mob to the Stasi. The secret police had hoped to come quietly and privately and take him away where nobody would see it or know it, and the voice of the gospel would be shut up. And instead the crowd stands deep and thick outside of the church. And one observer said even the Gypsies came to stand.

And then the mayor got worried and the mayor came and he said to the people, "Go home, go home." And one old woman in the crowd said, "We are not going home. You will not take our

pastor." The word came to Ceaucescu at headquarters. He wasn't bothered at all. He was getting ready to leave on a trip, and he said, Tell them to shoot. And the local military, who included sons from that area, would not shoot. But the Stasi would. And so when the crowd did not disband, they took their rifles and they shot into the crowd.

And we will never know how many people died that day. But we know that at least 650 people were buried in a common grave. And the people said "that's enough." And Ceaucescu came back from his trip to the palace. And to his horror and amazement, the crowd was no longer in Timisoara, outside the pastor's house. The crowd was standing in the street outside of the palace, and when he came out onto the balcony and he said, "Go to your homes." The people said one word: "Timisoara, Timisoara, Timisoara."

And then they began to wave the Romanian flag with a hammer and sickle cut out of the middle, the old colors of the country. And the dictator got into his helicopter. And as he flew away, the people in front of the street went down the street where there was a Christian who was a poet, and he had been under house arrest for a long period of time, no one allowed to go in or out. And as they came towards the house, the Stasi, the secret police had gotten the word.

And they were starting to flee because they knew that oppression was coming to an end. And they yelled at the poet. And he came out, long black straggly hair and a beard and large black boots, jeans. And they said, you must come with us. And they marched to the main street and then to the television station. And this poet, unkempt as he was went for the first moment onto

Romanian television. And these were his opening words. "Today, God has seen fit to smile on Romania. The power of God is greater than all the pharaohs of earth."

All the pressures, all the bosses, all the temptations. Two ordinary women, Shiphrah and Puah. The beginning of God's work of deliverance.

Let us pray. Lord, we thank you that you don't just work with great people in dramatic ways. But with faithful people who, in the realities of their human existence, fear you more than they do the pressures of disapproval, conformity to evil, denial of faith. We pray, Lord, that from Shiphrah and Puah, you would teach us what courage is. You would teach us what it is to have companions with us, to help us do what is right.

You would teach us that fear of God, which knows you to be powerful and compassionate, that we might, with joy, risk our lives, joining in what you want to do in the world. To bring freedom, abundant life, forgiveness, joy to every person. Help us to be part of your work in the world through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen.