

**World YWCA and World Alliance of YMCAs
Week of Prayer and World Fellowship**

November 9-15, 2014



Bible Reading Plan 2014-2015

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge with thanks the valuable contribution of Dr Ulrike Bechmann as the author of the daily meditations of this Week of Prayer booklet.

We would also like to thank Ana Villanueva who provided precious comments during the development of the booklet.

Suggested order of worship: adapted from “Worship with Singing”, World YWCA Council, Kenya 2007, ©2007 World YWCA

The reflections are edited and used with permission from the author.

Cover design by Lucy Lloenyosi.Inc.

©2014 World YWCA

We encourage you to photocopy or quote from this publication as long as credit is given to the source.

This booklet is available online at: www.worldywca.org and www.ymca.int

Table of Contents

Presidents' Message	4
Day One: Shiprah and Puah: Building a Team in Resistance	7
Day Two: The Mother of Moses: Taking a Risk, Naming the Crime	10
Day Three: The Sister of Moses – Witnessing and Crossing Borders	13
Day Four: The Daughter of Pharaoh: Informed and Compassionate	16
Day Five: Maidens of the Daughter of Pharaoh: Supportive and Living Solidarity	19
Day Six: Where is God? God's absence and presence	22
Suggested Order of Worship	25
Bible Reading Plan 2014 – 2015	30

President's Message

Welcome to the 2014 Week of Prayer. Our theme this year is bold and transformative leadership inspired by the Book of Exodus. Our main story for the week-long reflections tells the story of Moses' birth and survival at a time when other male Hebrew babies were destined for slaughter.

The Bible is full of stories of bold and transformative leaders - women, men, young people and elders - who accepted the call of God to change the situation of their people. Among those leaders Moses stands out to be one of the most extraordinary leaders due the scope of his leadership. But what is not highlighted enough is that Moses was not a self-made leader. From his birth to the end of his life different people played different roles which formed his character as a leader.

This week our attention will be on women who built, through their own example, his foundation of bold and transformational leadership. Perhaps being rescued and nurtured by women made Moses acutely aware of the challenges and oppression women face. So much to the extent that he was willing to resist any form of oppression that affected his people.

The stories that we will be sharing this week speak to the power of fear in our lives, but also to the power of individuals to transcend fear and authority and act in a way that changed the course of history in the face of extreme danger and threat of persecution. Fear breeds insecurity. We seek to destroy that which we fear. Pharaoh feared the Hebrews and sought to destroy all male babies to protect his own position. Perhaps, because he had doubts whether his position was approved by God, Pharaoh felt vulnerable and sought to destroy anyone who could potentially usurp or challenge his position and power.

The YMCA and YWCA focus on the empowerment of youth and women. Only leaders who are secure in their mission and position can truly empower others. If we feel threatened and insecure, we respond by seeking to eliminate the perceived threat by any means necessary, rather than taking any action which may empower someone to rightfully challenge our power, authority or leadership.

Pharaoh's people knew that his orders were oppressive and wrong. However, their own fears paralysed them and caused them to do as they were told in order to protect themselves and save their own lives and positions. What do we choose to do in the face of such injustice? The mid-wives demonstrated respect for life and feared God more than Pharaoh, a man – albeit a powerful king. Their faith gave them the strength to defy Pharaoh. They demonstrated bold leadership by overcoming fear rather than being paralysed by it. Their leadership and bold decisiveness was transformative because it changed the course of history. The baby they saved turned out to be the person destined to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt.

God used “ordinary” mid-wives, not women of influence or affluence. They were unnamed, unidentified women who changed the world and changed the course of human history. No one is too small to do God's work. Knowing that we are doing the right thing and doing God's will gives us strength and courage to make bold and transformative decisions and to challenge the status quo. Pharaoh's daughter was empowered by taking the difficult decision to defy her father's orders. This demonstration of independent thought and action reminds us how easy it is to compromise ourselves when we feel so dependent on others that we cannot stand up to or challenge them when it really is the right thing to do. Leadership requires sacrifice. How much are we prepared to give up or lose in order to make a bold and transformative decision?

The story of Pharaoh's daughter demonstrates that when one takes a stand and decides to do the right thing, others are motivated to follow and support. With this action we are reminded that sometimes it only takes one person to start an entire movement. Are we willing to be the one who takes that bold step, who dares to be different, who dares to challenge authority and defy the King in order to do the right thing? The collective power of people is evident. Even though they have different roles, the women in these readings are united by shared values and a common purpose to save the life of Moses and enable him to become a bold and transformative leader and to fulfil his destiny and God's purpose.

The readings this week celebrate the resourcefulness and bold and transformative leadership of individuals who take risks to make impactful change. For over a century the YMCA and the YWCA movements have

nurtured, protected and fought for such women, men and young people and we have given them a voice. We invite all of you to go through this week's reflections by thinking about how in your individual and collective capacity you could stand against the status quo that undignifies individuals and communities. May you be inspired by these readings to be bold and to stand up to injustice – this world is desperately in need of more heroes.

Deborah Thomas Austin
President
World YWCA

Peter Posner
President
World Alliance of YMCAs

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D Thomas". The signature is stylized with a large, looped initial "D" and a trailing "mas.".A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "P Posner". The signature is cursive and fluid.

Day 1: Shiprah and Puah: Building a Team in Resistance

The people of Israel were deprived in Egypt and the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel...

Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiph'rah and the other Pu'ah. "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, she shall live." But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. So the king of Egypt called the midwives, and said to them, "Why have you done this, and let the male children live?"

The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and are delivered before the midwife comes to them." So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God he gave them families. (Ex 1.15-21)

The first to resist the Pharaoh and who worked proactively for life are the midwives Shiprah and Puah. Their profession put them literally at the beginning of life, the very first minutes of birth. As midwives they work to protect mothers and children, they are dedicated to life and fighting death. Of all things they got the order to kill all male Hebrews babies because “the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel”

Israel's perspective, like any perspective of human rights, recognizes the edict as inhuman and wrong. However, from the perspective of the Pharaoh, he fears for his people to be overrun by the Hebrews. Hearing the Pharaoh's argument brings the politics of today to mind. How often people are identified as being dreaded by their own people even if the number is relatively small! In the first five months of 2014, it is estimated that more than 500 refugees drowned in the Mediterranean because Europe fears their coming in. Refugees in other regions are also thought of being too many, just as the Pharaoh considered the Hebrews. People with a different faith are also looked at as “others” menacing their own faith or community. Argumentations like this can easily feel convincing; it is not easy to question and see through them. To resist a deadly power presupposes the

requirement to analyse the situation and to probe the rules and rulers. What kind of rules lie behind power? What is the basis of the law and what are the values the law protects and enforces? It is necessary to be politically informed.

The midwives decide to resist. They recognised the deadly power and opt for a power of life and liberation. They disobeyed the Pharaoh's edict to kill all male Hebrew babies. They were faithful to God who gives life! Their decision was bold and courageous. Resistance to deadly structures and rules put them in danger, and they could be easily held responsible for ignoring the edict. But they act according to their conscience. In the midst of violent structures they are shrewd and calculating. They are not obedient to a power, but obedient to God and their conscience.

But what can be done against such a powerful ruler? Their way of acting is that of the trickster. Trickster is the weapon of the “subordinate one”, those who have no power and are under threat. They tell a lie using the prejudices of the Pharaoh and his stereotypes about the Hebrew people. They play with the created distinction between “Us” and “Them”. “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women ...” Looking at this argument from a Hebrew perspective you laugh: What a trick! And the Egyptians believe it. How amazing! But looking at many societies one can see that this is how exclusion works. There is a difference between “us” and “them”. The difference might not exist in reality but in the view of the others. This artificial difference dehumanises and is the basis to treat people differently. The midwives take up this exclusive thinking and use it to save life.

Looking back they are doing what was developed by the theology of liberation. They saw the need, they judged the ruler and they acted. Their disobedience to a deadly power was the first step to Exodus. However, the Pharaoh now relied on his own people: They were ordered to kill all male babies.

Questions for personal and group reflection

Are there situations in your community, country or continent where people “disobey” to protect lives?

What are the new or modern realities which require resistance from our part?

What creative way do the midwives find to use the prejudices against the Hebrews to resist violence? Is there a possibility to act in a similar way?

Together, as a team, the midwives take responsibility and leadership in times of crisis. How much is teambuilding valued as a tool for leadership?

What are the spiritual sources for the courage to resist?

Prayer

God, you are the creator of life, who gives breath to the people and spirit to those who walk in you. May we be aware of your abundant love for us as for everyone. Hear the cry of those who are in danger and those who resist violence in order to save them. Send your spirit for new, creative, non-violent ways to work for life. (U.B.)

Day 2: The Mother of Moses: Taking a Risk, Naming the Crime

Now a man from the house of Levi went and took to wife a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could hide him no longer she took for him a basket made of bulrushes, and daubed it with bitumen and pitch; and she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds at the river's brink. (Ex 2.1-3)

Only one mother is put into the scene; she represents all the mothers of children, whose destiny is an early death. The first thing we hear from her is that she, the daughter of a Levite, is taken by a Levite. Only later, in Ex 6.20, her name Jochebed is introduced. Apart from the midwives Shiphrah and Puah all women in Ex 2 have no names. They are “daughter, sister, or mother of ...” a male person. No name deprives the women of their own individual identity. But here the language is contrasted with the importance of their leadership for the people.

When the child was born the mother of Moses sees him: He was very good. The English translation plays her active role down. She is the bearer of life and her seeing and judging parallels her with God in Gen 1: God sees the creation: It is very good. That the child has no name insists that any life of any child is “very good” and thus all children who are in danger are worthy of our efforts to protect them.

This courageous mother takes a very high risk hiding her child for three months. But then her options come to an end. The deadly power is too strong. At this point of desperation she builds a basket made of bulrushes daubed with bitumen and pitch. The description uses the same Hebrew words for the Ark that Noah had built. Unlike Noah she has no guidance and advisory by God. She knows on her own. She puts the child inside the Ark and among the reeds at the river's brink. Three Hebrew words depict the highest mortal danger. Of course, “the river” in Egypt is the Nile. But as a no name-river the story refers to all the waters that are dangerous. The sheltering ark is placed in an extremely dangerous place. Shelter or water – which one will win?

What is this woman doing? Even within the best possible shelter how can we imagine exposing a child to the dangerous elements of a river? Her action is remarkable in terms of leadership and responsibility in a situation of oppression and concealed killings. Nobody is allowed to protest openly, nobody can resist openly: the killing is going on in secrecy and there is no help in sight. Putting the child in the reeds means two things: it can be seen and it sets a sign. Whoever is going to kill this child has to do it publicly, out in the open. The political crimes become blatant and public. Here is a regime that kills and brings death! Putting the child in an ark into the water is a desperate outcry. This river is a water of death; it should be red by the blood of all the boys who were slaughtered here! She speaks out – not by speaking but by signalling openly what happens every day. Her action is paradox but makes the hidden obvious. She acts contrary to her “normal” role. But she lives not in a “normal” time. So she who gave life to the child now brings the child into mortal danger. It is a political wake up call for any who share the same values, who works for life and against oppression, deadly life conditions and murder.

It will not be her only role in the story. When her protest is successful she is able to live what her role in a normal life would be: To be a mother that nourishes the child. And even better: She is paid for by the daughter of the Pharaoh. Knowing that the child is safe she is able to bring it to the other daughter of the story, the daughter of the Pharaoh (V.10). She succeeded: The child will live!

Questions for personal and group reflection

Moses' fate is an example of the fate of all children who are in danger through open violence or poverty. Are there similar structures in your context?

The desperate mother of Moses finds a way to make the hidden crime on the children obvious. Are there injustices hidden in your society / region?

Are you able to identify the people who take a risk and work for better living conditions?

What would be a creative way to gain public alertness to the tasks which the YWCA/YMCA identified as priority?

Prayer

God of mercy, so many people are taking a risk of public or political resistance in order to overcome injustices; so many people are desperate and exhausted fighting for a better life in dignity. Comfort those who are desperate. Give power to the faint, and to them who have no might increases strength. Let us recognise the gifts you gave and guide us to see those who are in need of solidarity. (U.B.)

Day 3: The Sister of Moses – Witnessing and Crossing Borders

And his sister stood at a distance, to know what would be done to him (Ex 2.4). When the daughter of Pharaoh took the child she came forward. Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. (Ex 2.7)

The first one to recognise the public protest is the sister of Moses, again without a name and related to a man. She stands for all sisters who are aware of the fate of her brothers and sisters. She watches what goes on at a distance. Taking the child out of the water would change nothing in the situation. Standing directly beneath the arc would have put her in a risky and dangerous position. She is not able to go there but she does as much as she can. For the moment she is not directly intermingling, active, protesting. But her role shouldn't be underestimated.

While watching she stands. This is a special and very seldom used word in the Bible. It means not only "standing on the feet" but "to take a stand" or "to stand firm". The word is used for Israel at the Red Sea. On the command of God Israel is standing firm at the shore of the Red Sea; Israel is watching how the mighty power of Egypt is destroyed. What will the sister see? Unlike Israel she has no command from God but decides on her own to watch and to stand firm; she is alert and watching for the things to come, whether for good or for bad. It is possible that she will have to watch the killing of the child. But she doesn't look away. Who would not prefer to look away rather than be disturbed by such terrible images? That others look away is what many people who are in need of support, help and solidarity, are experiencing.

The sister of Moses is not rushing to help with no plan and analysis, destroying the possibilities that might come up. Watching and looking closely in a difficult situation is the first step to action. Analysing oppression is the first step to a liberating process. To know how to act requires the strength to stand firm and not to look away. Helplessness is often the feeling you have when you are confronted with overwhelming powers, with violence, with misuse and oppression. And yet, she does not give up too soon. Even though she fears what she might see, she does not leave. She

is realistic about what she could do – she can only watch to see what happens next. She is standing firm and not counting how long this might be necessary.

Her important role is to witness what is going on. What chance could she have to do anything for the child? Nonetheless she needs to be a witness at least. But in her witnessing she recognises when the kairos, the right moment came for her to act. And indeed: her time to act is still to come! Observing the scene gave her the insight. Thinking along the ruling lines will bring no solution. You have to think beyond! Suddenly she sees a chance.

And what she does is brave - she talks to the enemy. She crosses the borders of solidarity and bridges the gap between the daughters who have to be enemies by the decision of the Pharaoh. She speaks to the daughter of Pharaoh. She talks to her! Maybe she will find her hostile as she is marked by ideology, prejudices or simply propaganda. But maybe she has values of her own. The sister offers a chance for the daughter of “the hostile other” to react for herself.

The sister of Moses crosses the border of “we” and “them”. She offers a new and transformative solidarity that is not foreseen by the oppressive system. She thinks anew. The daughter of Pharaoh with all her might relies on the help of a woman who is her foe. She crosses borders in order to save lives. Two times during the dialogue the sister of Moses addresses the daughter of Pharaoh, saying: “for you”. Even in her lower position she is able to do something for the mighty woman. The sister’s help enables the Pharaoh’s daughter’s decision to take Moses as her son. Having done this the sister is called ‘almah’, young woman. And in the end she is right: The other young woman, the daughter of Pharaoh is also able to think beyond and establishing a new solidarity.

This young woman stands firm! Witnessing and not avoiding a menacing situation gave her the chance to realise what she can do and when the right moment is there to get involved. Stand firm and look straight ahead – it is a message for all who are feeling helpless and unable to take action. Stand firm – this is your time.

Questions for personal and group reflection

Which situation in your own context or in the world calls you to stand firm and look straight ahead?

How does your YWCA or YMCA get involved in apparently hopeless situation?

The sister of Moses stands at a distance and is witness of what is going on. Reflect on the importance to be the witness of what happens in today's society.

How do the YMCA and YWCA empower young people to stand firm in situations where human dignity is violated?

What spiritual resources are supporting the attitude to see the other as a human being?

The sister of Moses talks to the enemy. What enables your work in the YMCA/YWCA to overcome boundaries of thinking in order to find new solutions for problems?

Prayer

God, open our eyes to see the truth of the other. Open our eyes and give strength to look incorruptly at what is going on. Open our eyes so that we can serve as a witness for people who have no one to speak for them. Open our eyes to see the limitedness of boundaries that hinder creative thinking and doing. Open our eyes, o God, who sees (Gen 16). (U.B.)

Day 4: The Daughter of Pharaoh: Informed and Compassionate

Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, and her maidens walked beside the river; she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to fetch it. When she opened it she saw the child; and lo, the babe was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." (Ex 2.5-6)

The sister of Moses offers to bring a nurse. She is sent to find a nurse and she fetches the baby's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away, and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son; and she named him Moses, for she said, "Because I drew him out of the water." (Ex 2.9-10)

Like all women in Ex 2 the daughter of Pharaoh bears no name. She is defined by the ruler who gave the order to kill the Hebrew new-born sons. However, her first activity is to go down into the river, to descend, in order to clean herself as the Hebrew word states. She is not going to swim! Furthermore, the river is not a normal place for a woman of her position to clean herself. She leaves the privileges of her palatial environment and comes to the place where the crimes of her father take place. When she enters the river, she steps into the midst of the disaster for the Hebrews. Since the people of the Pharaoh are slaughtering the Hebrew sons, the water should be red from the blood of little children. How will she clean herself in such a place?

And there in the river, she finds a child threatened by death. When she recognizes the baby as "one of the Hebrew's children" she demonstrates that she knows politics. She is informed about what is going on in her country and what her father has commanded. She is informed and her maidens are informed. Nobody asks her how she knows. Next, she is bold enough to take action. Even belonging to the top of the oppressing system she takes a stand in favour of life even the life of the enemy.

How is the daughter of Pharaoh able to see beyond the propaganda? She trusts what she really sees in terms of humanity: She looks at a crying baby

who is in need and she pities the baby. She is able to feel empathy for a suffering child no matter who he or she is in terms of ethnicity, status, or religion. The daughter of Pharaoh is able to look behind the stigmas that are classifying people; in dividing them into “we” and “them”; in wiping out the human aspect and labeling the others as enemy, as foreigners, as poor, as women and not men, as persons with minor rights, as a different ethnic group. Only in erasing the awareness that every person is a human being, has feelings, has needs, suffers in pain, has talents and weaknesses is it possible to dehumanise the others and make it plausible to resist them. Such classifications erase the ability to feel with the other, to see the deprivation, to feel the pain. She in contrast has preserved her capability of empathy. In view of violence she decides on nonviolent resistance.

Bearing no name she stands for all daughters of inhuman systems who preserve an opinion of their own. She ignores the borders of prejudices and of political differences, and she insists on seeing a child as a child. She is not hiding her action. Now, she is the mother who proudly names the child. His name is a political statement that speaks publicly to the palace as well as to her people: “I drew him out of the water”. She could also have named him: I resisted the Pharaoh; or: I did not obey an inhuman regime; or: I insisted on treating a human being as human being. Her explanation of the name sets a question mark (?) behind the politics of her father and an exclamation mark (!) behind her action.

Like the sister of Moses she recognised that there is no help as long as she complied with the political structures and their borders. She had to think anew, to cross borders in order to work for a better world. She had to talk to the enemy, to share the common perspectives and values and to accept help from them. She drew a new line of solidarity: Solidarity between those who work for peace, life and against violence. And this solidarity with an option for a better world creates new alliances and new bonds to work proactively against exclusion and death.

Questions for personal and group reflection

Share a story in which you or your YWCA/YMCA have dared to cross borders for the sake of life despite public opposition

How could your YWCA/YMCA contribute to keep alive human dignity in your midst?

Although the daughter of Pharaoh is not involved in politics she is informed about the political situation.

What tools are needed to stay informed about political processes?

Are there measures to implement for the YMCA/YWCA group to empower the members on political awareness?

Are there borders of prejudices in society that hinder to see the other as a human being and find new solutions for problems?

Sharing common values is a basis for a new solidarity. Reflect about the possibilities to share values within the YMCA/YWCA and outside in order to build up a new solidarity.

Prayer

God bless you with insight to recognise violence in all its forms and the courage to name it and speak out for justice. Amen.

The Lord Jesus bless you with compassion for the vulnerable, and grace to stand with them, sharing his strength. Amen.

The Holy Spirit bless you with a prayerful heart, and power to breathe peace, transforming the world. Amen.

The blessing of the holy and glorious Trinity, eternal Wisdom, living Word, abiding Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

(A Blessing taken from A Prayer Book for Australia, n.43 on p 69)

Day 5: Maidens of the Daughter of Pharaoh: Supportive and Living Solidarity

Text: Ex 2.5 -6 – 2.9.10

Again: The maidens around the daughter of Pharaoh are not named. For maidens or slave women or domestic workers it seems to be the norm. It enables society to ignore their personal identity. And yet they are like a “team” for the daughter of Pharaoh. As they walk along the shore of the river, they walk on her side while she leaves the safe place of wealth and power. They are called nacarot. It can mean young women but it also can mean maidens or slave girls. However, they are young like the other daughters in this narrative.

But one of the maidens plays an outstanding role. She has an extra title and is called ‘amah’. It is the word for a wife without full rights. She maybe the first, second or third wife; in any case she is dependent – but on whom? The Pharaoh? This would put her close to Pharaoh and sharpen the contrast between the Pharaoh and his daughter’s saving act. Surely she is no someone who is allowed to give orders to the daughter. On the contrary she receives orders from her.

This deprived woman sticks out of the crew of maidens through the extra title (‘amah) as well as through her action. She is fulfilling the decisive action: She has to fetch the little arc out of the water and draw the basket to the bank for the daughter of Pharaoh. By saving the child she leaves the anonymity of the group and steps into the middle of the scene. Acting on the order of the daughter of Pharaoh gives her an extra role. She represents all these women who are not in the leading role but are prepared to move into action when need arises. According to her dependent status she has to leave the scene again and the daughter of Pharaoh will be remembered as the one who saved Moses.

The maidens are seemingly not active. They are walking back and forth on the bank of the Nile. Even if they are not actively saving the child like the ‘amah one should not underestimate their importance and role. They are accompanying the daughter of Pharaoh and give her a certain background, shelter and support, like a peer-group. Even living under control in a dependent and weak status they belong to the same place, to the palace

and the ruling family. They have to decide within the system whom they support: The Pharaoh or his daughter. Both represent the dominating powerful ruling family. But one person within the system, the daughter, had left the rules. What will they do?

The maidens show and live their solidarity with the daughter. They are not preventing her from saving the child. Indeed, she can rely on them and their solidarity. Wouldn't it be easy for one of them to give notice to the Pharaoh trying to get a better life for herself? Or to put the child back into the water, insisting on Pharaoh's order? None of these things happen. These maidens demonstrate that not only powerful people can leave a given structure and take a decision on their own. Also those who are dependent, weak, and apparently powerless within a given structure are challenged and able to take a decision. Doing nothing is an action, as is doing something actively.

The daughter of Pharaoh acts like a leader of a group of young women who are sharing her life, even in a low position. She includes the maidens into her actions. She takes them with her. She let them take part in her political and human gesture. She is not discussing things with them but nevertheless enables them to build up solidarity with her, women who have no voice of her own. But she knows that they have a decision to take.

Sometimes in a group women who are not very active or who are silent are overlooked and misjudged. This silent solidarity is important and may support decisions, encourage meanings and enlarge solidarity. They may not speak out but they may support the option for life – and act in an unexpected way.

Questions for personal and group reflection

How is leadership experienced in your YWCA/YMCA?

Which is the space for those who are less vocal or visible?

The maidens of the daughter of Pharaoh are supportive even if they are silent. Leadership implies to recognise the impact the silent persons have.

Reflect which members of the YMCA/YWCA are standing at a distance or are silent but supportive. What is their actual impact on the work?

Look out for people who may stand in solidarity but seem to be outsiders.

Prayer

God, every nameless human being has a name that is engraved on the palms of your hands (Isaiah 49.15). But many people have to live without being called by their name. They are not recognised as individuals but by their status – migrant, maiden, Muslim, Christian, refugee. Help us to see deeper, to look at anybody as an individual person and to value each person as an image of you. Send us your spirit, God. (U.B.)

Day 6: Where is God? God's absence and presence

Text: Ex 2.5 -6 – 2.9.10

The story of Moses continued beyond childhood. We move on to when Moses as a young man recognises the slavery of his people and kills an Egyptian. He must flee to Midian and there another group of young women, Zippora and her sisters, meet Moses at the well. Zippora becomes his wife and on their way back to Egypt Zippora even has to circumcise Moses to save him from God's threat to kill him (Ex 4.24-26).

Having heard about all these brave young women who worked together to save Moses the question arises: Where is God? In the following story of the Exodus God is present, talking to Moses, sending him, ordering him, and eventually liberating Israel. But where is God's help in the very beginning of the Exodus? Only once God is mentioned. The midwives Shiprah and Puah choose God over Pharaoh and God acts on their behalf. And because the midwives feared God he gave them families. (Ex 1.15-21)

But unlike the story of Moses and Aaron God is not with the midwives at the Pharaoh's palace at the very critical and dangerous moment when they have to justify themselves. And God is not at the shore of the river to direct one of the young women there. Instead they have to act like God on their own. The mother of Moses sees like God; she builds an arc without God's guidance that had instructed Noah; the daughter of Pharaoh pitied the child like God who pitied the people when they cried out to God; the sister of Moses stood at the water and saw the need and stepped in like God who would bring help later on. The maiden drew Moses out of the water like God who would draw Israel out of the waters of the red sea. The sister of Moses and the daughter of Pharaoh have to cross borders like God who has no borders in saving people.

God seems not to be active in the beginning. The women have to act on their own ideas, their own courage and audacity, and take responsibility for their own decisions. And Zippora directly has to intervene against God's attack on Moses. Only later the text notes that God knows, hears the cry of the people, and sees.

During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel and God knew. (Ex 2.23-25)

God's knowing and seeing is the beginning of the liberation of Israel, even if slavery will endure many more years. The text ascertains that God is there. Likewise God's knowing and seeing is the beginning of his help. But the young women of Exodus didn't have this promise. They had to act on their own. They acted instead of God with actions that remind us of God's actions. For them God is absent.

This is an experience many people have, in the Bible as well as today. God is far, there is no help. Slavery endures; killings are not stopped; injustices prevail, and violence persists. Lamentations are a huge part of the Psalms and they are a prayer book for all people who have reason to lament. Not in every time and not in all places courageous people stand up and act effectively like the young women did.

Therefore the young women act in a joint and unusual coalition of working together, and crossing the deadly borders that were drawn by the mighty ruler. Young people stand at the beginning of many liberating processes. In many societies protests against deadly structures began with the protest of young people. They are able to think beyond: beyond enmities, beyond prejudices, beyond any limitations. They are able to analyse situations and to act on their own. They are able to take a stand and to stand firm. And they are able to cross borders. These qualifications are at the core of a transgressive leadership; a leadership that has the ability to overcome boundaries and break new ground.

There is no guarantee that God is there. Was God really absent? Is one absent when one is not talking? Each person has to take the decision to analyse what is going on, to accept responsibility, to become active, or to stand in solidarity. And it is possible that at no time God is felt to be there. The narrative of the Exodus wants to affirm that at least there can be hope that God hears, sees and knows. That it is God who may back up the actions of people even if it takes a long time. In the end God is there. But it needs a decision of trust. And this decision doesn't suspend the other

message: Trust young women and men, they are able to act on behalf of life.

Questions for personal and group reflection

The Bible offers great parts of the Psalms and other texts as a lament about God's absence. They bundle the experiences of countless situations of people and offer a resource for dealing with this experience.

Take time to reflect in your group if in certain situations there is a feeling of God's absence. What kind of situations are these? Exchange the experiences.

Take time to reflect in your group if in certain situations there is a feeling of God's presence. What kind of situations are these? Exchange the experiences.

Compare the differences: What can be said about the different context?

Prayer

God of peace, in many situations you seem to absent. Why are you waiting so long? There is hope that you know and see the joy and the suffering of all of us. But very often this hope is not experienced by too many people. Don't wait too long! People are desperately longing for peace, for freedom, for human rights. Send your spirit and your peace! Amen. (UB)

Suggested Order of Worship

Do not be conformed to this world.

Leader

All

GREETING

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters by the mercies of God, by the womb of God, to present your bodies holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world.

Woman comes in.

SONG

Do not be conformed to this world distracted by many things. **Changing lives.**

A man comes in.

Do not be conformed to this world. Tell her to help me. **Changing communities**

A second man comes in.

Do not be conformed to this world. Choose the better path.

Changing ourselves and each other

Another woman enters.

By the womb of God, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, sitting at the feet listening to what is said welcoming Christ in. **We praise the Blessed Trinity, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

SONG

LAMENT

How can we not conform, God?

We need to eat.

We need to work.

We need to get medicine. We need to go to school.

How can we not be conformed to this world?

SING RESPONSE

There are too many sacrifices,

Too many hurts,

Too many cast aside,

With penalties we cannot abide.

How can we not be conformed to this world?

SING RESPONSE

Rules reward.

Laws legislate losers.

Culture keeps us in our place.

How can we not be conformed to this world?

SING RESPONSE

We will be taunted

We will be cursed .

We will be cast out,

Condemned and coerced.

How can we not be conformed to this world?

GOSPEL READING

SONG

RESPONSE TO THE WORD

Prepare a bowl with many coloured beads. Each participant is invited to choose a bead from the bowl

How easy it is for some women to put others in their place. It is not just men which define women's role in society or in the home. But other women break through the prescribed patterns. Mary's behaviour was outrageous within her culture. But Jesus says hers is the better way. Still, we all need people who get things done, who can organize others, who care about the needs of others. If Martha had thrown the meal to the birds maybe Jesus would have had second thoughts.

Does Jesus want us to divide ourselves into Marys who get the prize, and Marthas, who do the work, but get no praise. The story is not about division, but about opportunities and grace, the possibility of seeing a new perspective, of recognizing the gift passing by, of seizing the moment to be remade.

Was there a time when you were so engrossed in obligations that you missed an opportunity? Many women have such an experience. With the bead in your hand, name the loss. Maybe you are still in such a situation. Squeeze the bead hard and pray with Martha, Lord don't you care? You may say this silently or aloud in your language. Maybe you want to pray it several times.

Pray silent or aloud

We do not all need to become as outrageous as Mary, but maybe we need some moments when we see Jesus speaking anew to us, when we wait on what Jesus has to say to us. Jesus said to Martha, "Mary, has chosen the better way." If Martha was thinking she was doing the better way, she would not have needed to complain. So we question each other in love. With the bead in your hand, turn to one of your neighbours asking, "Have

you chosen the best thing?" Wait. Then ask, "What 'better part' might you choose today? Wait. These are not easy questions. Maybe there comes a verbal answer but this is not necessary. Then this person asks the same questions of you.

Questions, Answers

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Surprising Guest turning things upside down setting aside old patterns embracing those loving outrageously for the sake of the gospel gather those who are different within your arms; protect them and give them courage to continue on the better part you offer.

Transform us, God, so we are not conformed to this world.

SONG

Invited Guest waiting for some supper waiting for someone to listen waiting for someone to follow your way don't you care that many, many millions work too hard and get little reward. **Transform us, God, so we are not conformed to this world.**

SONG

Unwanted guest challenging presumptions insisting on compassion and demanding new forms of justice release those who are trapped and see no way to free themselves. Free those who need to find new ways forward. Hold close to you those who are too afraid to choose the better part.

Transform us, God, so we are not conformed to this world.

SONG

Guest and Host undergirding those who serve supporting those who find new ways forward lifting those who struggle for an end to oppression be with those who have to take decisions which promote life, even when they may not be the expected ones in their context. May the course of the YWCA be guided by your hand through their commitment and honesty.

May their different understandings lead to a YWCA which changes lives and communities, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

BENEDICTION

SONG

Bible Reading Plan 2014-2015

November 2014

- 1 Revelation 15 :5-8
- 2 Psalm 139
- 3 Revelation 16 :1-9
- 4 Revelation 16:10-16
- 5 Revelation 16 :17-21
- 6 Revelation 17 :1-6
- 7 Revelation 17 :7-14
- 8 Revelation 17 :15-18
- 9 Psalm 75
- 10 Revelation 18 :1-24
- 11 Revelation 19 :1-10
- 12 Revelation 19 :11-21
- 13 Revelation 20 :1-10
- 14 Revelation 20 :11-15
- 15 Revelation 21 :1-8
- 16 Psalm 50
- 17 Revelation 21:9-14
- 18 Revelation 21 :15-21
- 19 Revelation 21:22-27
- 20 Revelation 22 :1-5
- 21 Revelation 22 :6-15
- 22 Revelation 22 :16-21
- 23 Psalm 90
- 24 Isaiah 1:1-9
- 25 Isaiah 1:10-20
26. Isaiah 2:1-5
- 27 Isaiah 3:1-15
- 28 Isaiah 4:2-6
- 29 Isaiah 5:1-7

30 Psalm 24

December 2014

1. Isaiah 5 :8-24
2. Isaiah 6 :1-13
3. Isaiah 7 :1-9
4. Isaiah 7:10-17
5. Isaiah 8:1-15
6. Isaiah 8:23-9, 6
7. Psalm 1
8. Isaiah 11 :1-10
9. Isaiah 12 :1-6
10. Isaiah 14 :1-23
11. Isaiah 24 :1-23
12. Isaiah 25 :1-9
13. Isaiah 26:1-6
14. Psalm 33
15. Isaiah 26 : 7-19
16. Isaiah 28 :14-22
17. Isaiah 29 :17-24
18. Isaiah 30 :1-17
19. Isaiah 32 :1-20
20. Isaiah 33 :17-24
21. Psalm 58
22. Isaiah 35 :1-10
23. Matthew 1 :1-17
24. Matthew 1:18-25
25. Matthew 2 :1-12
26. Matthew 2 :13-23
27. Matthew 3 :1-12
28. Psalm 93

January 2015

- 1 Psalm 8
- 2 Genesis 1 :1-13
- 3 Genesis 1 :14-25

- 4 Psalm 33
- 5 Genesis 1 :26-2,4a
- 6 Psalm 72
- 7 Genesis 2 :4b-17
- 8 Genesis 2:18-25
- 9 Genesis 3:1-13
- 10 Genesis 3:14-24

- 11 Psalm 101
- 12 Genesis 4:1-16
- 13 Genesis 4:17-26
- 14 Genesis 6:5-22
- 15 Genesis 7:11-24
- 16 Genesis 8:1-12
- 17 Genesis 8 :13-22

- 18 Psalm 70
- 19 Genesis 9:1-17
- 20 Genesis 11:1-9
- 21 Genesis 12:1-9
- 22 Genesis 12 :10-20
- 23 Genesis 13:1-18
- 24 Genesis 14 :1-16

- 25 Psalm 63
- 26 Genesis 14:17-24
- 27 Genesis 15:1-21
- 28 Genesis 16:1-16
- 29 Genesis 17 :1-14
- 30 Genesis 17:15-27
- 31 Genesis 18:1-15

February 2015

- 1 Psalm 62
- 2 Genesis 18:16-33
- 3 Genesis 19:1-14
- 4 Genesis 19:15-29
- 5 Genesis 21:1-21
- 6 Genesis 22:1-19
- 7 Genesis 23:1-20

- 8 Psalm 4
- 9 Romans 1:1-7
- 10 Romans 1:8-15
- 11 Romans 1:16-17
- 12 Romans 1:18-32
- 13 Romans 2:1-16
- 14 Romans 2:17-29

- 15 Psalm 60
- 16 Romans 3:1-8
- 17 Romans 3:9-20
- 18 Romans 3:21-26
- 19 Romans 3:27-31
- 20 Romans 4:1-12
- 21 Romans 4:13-25

- 22 Psalm 30
- 23 Romans 5:1-5
- 24 Romans 5:6-11
- 25 Romans 5:12-21
- 26 Romans 6:1-11
- 27 Romans 6:12-23
- 28 Romans 7:1-6

March 2015

- 1 Psalm 10
- 2 Romans 7:7-13

3 Romans 7:14-25
4 Romans 8:1-11
5 Romans 8:12-17
6 Romans 8:18-25
7 Romans 8:26-30

8 Psalm 34
9 Romans 8:31-39
10 Romans 9:1-5
11 Romans 9:6-13
12 Romans 9:14-29
13 Romans 9:30-10,4
14 Romans 10 :5-13

15 Psalm 84
16 Romans 10:14-21
17 Romans 11:1-10
18 Romans 11:11-16
19 Romans 11 :17-24
20 Romans 11:25-32
21 Romans 11:33-36

22 Psalm 69:1-16
23 Matthew 26:1-16
24 Matthew 26:17-30
25 Matthew 26:31-35
26 Matthew 26:36-46
27 Matthew 26:47-56
28 Matthew 26:57-68

29 Psalm 69:17-37
30 Matthew 26:69-75
31 Matthew 27:1-14

April 2015

1 Matthew 27:15-30
2 Matthew 27:31-44

3 Matthew 27:45-56
4 Matthew 27:57-66

5 Matthew 28:1-10
6 Matthew 28:11-20
7 Romans 12:1-2
8 Romans 12:3-8
9 Romans 12:9-21
10 Romans 13:1-7
11 Romans 13:8-14

12 Psalm 116
13 Romans 14:1-12
14 Romans 14:13-23
15 Romans 15:1-6
16 Romans 15:7-13
17 Romans 15:14-21
18 Romans 15;22-33

19 Psalm 23
20 Romans 16:1-16
21 Romans 16:17-27
22 Proverbs 1:1-7
23 Proverbs 1:8-19
24 Proverbs 1:20-33
25 Proverbs 2:1-22

26 Psalms 103
27 Proverbs 3:1-12
28 Proverbs 3:13-26
29 Proverbs 3: 27-35
30 Proverbs 4:10-19

May 2015

1 Proverbs 4:20-27
2 Proverbs 5:1-23

3 Psalm 108
4 Proverbs 6:6-11
5 Proverbs 6:12-19
6 Proverbs 7:1-27
7 Proverbs 8:1-21
8 Proverbs 8:22-36
9 Proverbs 9:1-18

10 Psalm 100
11 Philippians 1:1-11
12 Philippians 1:12-18a
13 Philippians 1:18b-26
14 Psalm 110
15 Philippians 1:27-2,4
16 Philippians 2;5-11

17 Psalm 27
18 Philippians 2:12-18
19 Philippians 2:19-30
20 Philippians 3:1-11
21 Philippians 3:12-21
22 Philippians 4:1-9
23 Philippians 4:10-23

24 Psalm 118:1-14
25 Psalm 51:12-14
26 Genesis 24:1-28
27 Genesis 24:29-49
28 Genesis 24:50-67
29 Genesis 25:19-34
30 Genesis 27:1-29

31 Psalm 111

June 2015

1 Genesis 27:30-40
2 Genesis 27:41-28,9

3 Genesis 28:10-22
4 Genesis 29:1-14a
5 Genesis 29:14b-30
6 Genesis 31:1-7,14-32

7 Psalm 106:1-23
8 Genesis 31:33-54
9 Genesis 32:1-22
10 Genesis 32:23-33
11 Genesis 33:1-20
12 Genesis 37:1-11
13 Genesis 37:12-36

14 Psalm 106:24-48
15 Genesis 39:1-23
16 Genesis 40:1-23
17 Genesis 41:1-36
18 Genesis 41:37-57
19 Genesis 42:1-28
20 Genesis 42:29-38

21 Psalm 107:1-22
22 Genesis 43:1-14
23 Genesis 43:15-34
24 Genesis 44:1-34
25 Genesis 45:1-24
26 Genesis 45:25-46,7
27 Genesis 46:28-34

28 Psalm 107:23-43
29 Genesis 47:1-12
30 Genesis 47:27-31

July 2015

1 Genesis 48:1-22
2 Genesis 49:1-28
3 Genesis 49:29-50,14

4 Genesis 50:15-26
5 Psalm 114
6 Matthew 4:18-22
7 Matthew 4:23-25
8 Matthew 5:1-12
9 Matthew 5:13-20
10 Matthew 5:21-26
11 Matthew 5:27-32

12 Psalm 119:1-8
13 Matthew 5:33-37
14 Matthew 5:38-48
15 Matthew 6:1-4
16 Matthew 6:5-15
17 Matthew 6:16-18
18 Matthew 6:19-23

19 Psalm 119:9-16
20 Matthew 6:24-34
21 Matthew 7:1-6
22 Matthew 7:7-11
23 Matthew 7:12-23
24 Matthew 7:24-29
25 Matthew 8:1-4

26 Psalm 119:17-24
27 Matthew 8:5-13
28 Matthew 8:14-17
29 Matthew 8:18-22
30 Matthew 8:23-27
31 Matthew 8:28-34

August 2015

1 Matthew 9:1-8
2 Psalm 40

3 Matthew 9:9-13
4 Matthew 9:14-17
5 Matthew 9:18-26
6 Matthew 9:27-34
7 Matthew 9:35-10,4
8 Matthew 10:5-15

9 Psalm 64
10 Matthew 10:16-26a
11 Matthew 10:26b-33
12 Matthew 10:34-39
13 Matthew 10:40-42
14 Matthew 11:1-19
15 Matthew 11:20-24

16 Psalm 113
17 Matthew 11:25-30
18 Matthew 12:1-14
19 Matthew 12:15-21
20 Matthew 12:22-37
21 Matthew 12:38-45
22 Matthew 12:46-50

23 Psalm 16
24 Matthew 13:1-9.18-23
25 Matthew 13:10-17
26 Matthew 13:24-30.36-43
27 Matthew 13:31-35
28 Matthew 13:44-46
29 Matthew 13:47-52

30 Psalm 71
31 Matthew 13:53-58

September 2015

1 Matthew 14:1-12

2 Matthew 14:13-21
3 Matthew 14:22-36
4 Matthew 15:1-20
5 Matthew 15:21-28

6 Psalm 78:1-31
7 Matthew 15:29-39
8 Matthew 16:1-12
9 Matthew 16:13-20
10 Matthew 16:21-28
11 Matthew 17:1-13
12 Matthew 17:14-21

13 Psalm 78:32-55
14 Matthew 17:22-27
15 Matthew 18:1-9
16 Matthew 18:10-14
17 Matthew 18:15-20
18 Matthew 18:21-35
19 Matthew 19:1-12

20 Psalm 78:56-72
21 Matthew 19:13-15
22 Matthew 19:16-26
23 Matthew 19:27-30
24 Matthew 20:1-16
25 Matthew 20:17-28
26 Matthew 20:29-34

27 Psalm 25
28 Matthew 21:1-11
29 Matthew 21:12-17
30 Matthew 21:18-22

October 2015

1 Matthew 21:23-27
2 Matthew 21:28-32

3 Matthew 21:33-46

4 Psalm 104
5 Matthew 22:1-14
6 Matthew 22:15-22
7 Matthew 22:23-33
8 Matthew 22:34-46
9 Matthew 23:1-22
10 Matthew 23:23-39

11 Psalm 61
12 Job 1:1-12
13 Job 1:13-22
14 Job 2: 1-10
15 Job 2: 11-13
16 Job 3: 1-26
17 Job 4:1-21

18 Psalm 19
19 Job 5: 17-27
20 Job 6:1-10.24-30
21 Job 8:1-22
22 Job 9:1-3.21-35
23 Job 11 :1-20
24 Job 12 :1-6; 14,1-12


25 Psalm 22 :1-22
26 Job 19:21-29
27 Job 31: 16-40
28 Job 32: 1-22
29 Job 38: 1-21
30 Job 40: 1-5
31 Job 40 :6-32

November 2015

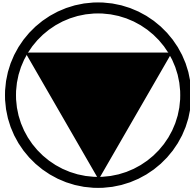
1 Psalm 22: 23-32
2 Job 42:1-6

- | | | | |
|----|-----------------|----|--------------------|
| 3 | Job 42: 7-9 | 17 | James 5:13-20 |
| 4 | Job 42: 10-17 | 18 | Matthew 24:1-14 |
| 5 | James 1 : 1-12 | 19 | Matthew 24:15-28 |
| 6 | James 1 :13-18 | 20 | Matthew 24:29-31 |
| 7 | James 1 :19-27 | 21 | Matthew 24:32-44 |
| 8 | Psalms 112 | 22 | Psalms 126 |
| 9 | James 2 :1-13 | 23 | Matthews 24:45-51 |
| 10 | James 2 :14-26 | 24 | Matthews 25:1-13 |
| 11 | James 3 :1-12 | 25 | Matthews 25 :14-30 |
| 12 | James 3 :13-18 | 26 | Matthews 25 :31-46 |
| 13 | James 4 :1-12 | 27 | Jude 1-16 |
| 14 | James 4 :13-5,6 | 28 | Jude 17-25 |
| 15 | Psalms 79 | 29 | Psalms 117 |
| 16 | James 5:7-12 | 30 | Isaiah 40 :1-11 |

Source: Ökumenische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Bibellesen
www.oeab.de/bibelleseplan/



Published by



World YWCA
16 Ancienne Route
1218 Geneva, Switzerland
www.worldywca.org



World Alliance of YMCAs
12 Clos-Belmont
1208 Geneva, Switzerland
www.ymca.int

Printed in Geneva, Switzerland
September 2014