

## “A Plague on Both Your Houses”

### Exodus 8: 1-15

**8** <sup>a</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and tell him: This is what the LORD says: Let my people go so that they can worship me. <sup>2</sup> If you refuse to let them go, then I’ll send a plague of frogs over your whole country. <sup>3</sup> The Nile will overflow with frogs. They’ll get into your palace, into your bedroom and onto your bed, into your officials’ houses, and among all your people, and even into your ovens and bread pans. <sup>4</sup> The frogs will crawl up on you, your people, and all your officials.” <sup>5</sup> And <sup>b</sup> the LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your shepherd’s rod over the rivers, the canals, and the marshes, and make the frogs crawl up all over the land of Egypt.’” <sup>6</sup> So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt. The frogs crawled up and covered the land of Egypt. <sup>7</sup> However, the Egyptian religious experts were able to do the same thing by their secret knowledge. They too made frogs crawl up onto the land of Egypt.

<sup>8</sup> Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, “If you pray to the LORD to get rid of the frogs from me and my people, then I’ll let the people go so that they can offer sacrifices to the LORD.”

<sup>9</sup> Moses said to Pharaoh, “Have it your way. When should I pray for you and your officials and your people to remove the frogs from your houses, courtyards, and fields? They’ll stay only in the Nile.”

<sup>10</sup> Pharaoh said, “Tomorrow!”

Moses said, “Just as you say! That way you will know that there is no one like the LORD our God. <sup>11</sup> The frogs will leave you, your houses, your officials, and your people. They’ll stay only in the Nile.” <sup>12</sup> After Moses and Aaron had left Pharaoh, Moses cried out to the LORD about the frogs that the LORD had brought on Pharaoh. <sup>13</sup> The LORD did as Moses asked. The frogs died inside the houses, out in the yards, and in the fields. <sup>14</sup> They gathered them together in big piles, and the land began to stink. <sup>15</sup> But when Pharaoh saw that the disaster was over, he became stubborn again and wouldn’t listen to them, just as the LORD had said.

This week, we are beginning a new sermon series. Over the next few weeks, we are taking a look at some of the weird stories which are in our Bible. I have to tell you that there have been many times this past week when I have questioned exactly why did I decide to go with this particular series. My first clue should have been when Teena and I were picking out hymns for September and it took us longer than normal to find any that would work.

Over and over again as I reviewed the stories of this particular sermon series, I kept asking myself, What are we supposed to do with these stories as people of faith? A plague of frogs? A talking donkey? A bear attacking children just because they made fun of a prophet's bald head? What are we supposed to do with stories about people not sharing their goods with the larger community of faith and they are struck dead? Or earthquakes which shake the prison walls and the people go free? What are we supposed to do with stories which tell us that a new Jerusalem will come down from heaven and the former will pass away?

As people of faith when it comes to these stories, we have a few choices available to us: one, we can skip over them, saying that they are simply just weird stories in our bible, saying that they serve no purpose. Another option available to us is to pretend that they don't exist. We can just delete them for the storyline of the Bible. Or,....or we can pick up their challenge and see how and why they fit into the larger narrative of God at work in the world. For some reason, when the

editors were putting the Bible together, they thought these stories said something about the character of God, said something about the nature of our relationship with God. Because there is a whole lot of material which did not make it into the final version of our Bible so it says something to us that these particular stories were included. It is up to us as people of faith to figure out why....

We begin this process of figuring out why with a story about a plague of frogs. As we may remember the Israelites were held as slaves in Egypt. God heard the people's cries and sends Moses to free God's people. Moses ask the Pharaoh to release the Israelites so that they could go worship their God but the Pharaoh's heart is hardened. He refuses to listen. So God bring the plagues, 10 in all, each one more disturbing, each one more devastating than the one before. The whole purpose of the plagues is to bring Pharaoh to acknowledge God's sovereignty in the world, that no earthly empire can match the power and might of God.

This is the context for our text today. In it, we read of the second plague. Moses goes to Pharaoh once more, asking to release the Israelites so that they can go and worship God. The Pharaoh again refuses which brings us to the plague of frogs. At first, it does not sound so bad. They are frogs. They are green. They hop. They catch flies. But look again at what we are told: "The Nile will swarm with frogs—they'll come up into your houses, into your bedrooms and into your beds, into your servants' quarters, among the people, into your ovens and pots and pans.

They'll be all over you, all over everyone—frogs everywhere, on and in everything!"

Now this is the statement which let us know that we have crossed the line from a nuisance to a plague. An important but it doesn't really answer our question as to why this story is included in our sacred text. There are some theories as to that. A few scholars suggest that the why can be found in an explanation of the ten plagues. They argue that the ten plagues are set up in contrast to 10 Egyptian gods and goddesses, that this is way the people of Israel are showing over and over again, that the their God is more powerful than the gods of their enemies. These scholars correspond the symbols used for the Egyptians gods and goddess to a particular plagues. So for example, they suggest that there was an Egyptian goddess whose head was in the shape of frog. She was known for being the goddess of fertility, water and renewal. And in this particular plague, God is using her symbol, the frog, to prove that no other god could compare to the God of the Israelites. God is using the symbol of the frog to bring about the Pharaoh to acknowledge God's sovereignty.

This is an interesting theory and it has merit but we don't need theories such as this to explain what the story already tells us. We already know that the Pharaoh's magicians imitated the "trick" of Moses. They brought more frogs to the

land. Yet only Moses was able to get rid of them. Only Moses, with God working through him, was able to stop the tide of frogs from getting worse.

The story makes this point clear in other ways as well. When the frogs all become too much, the Pharaoh summons Moses to his house. He demands that Moses stop this plague. With a little tongue in check, Moses says, Okay, when would you like this done? Moses wants the Pharaoh to understand that it is God and only God who has the power bring an end to this chaos.

Now it would be so easy for us as people of faith to draw some conclusions from our story to the chaos which we are experiencing in these uncertain times but as we all know, faith and life are always a bit more complicated than all that. As I have lived with this story this past week, I cannot help but be drawn to the actions of those magicians, to those who thought they were helping but only made matters worse, to those who thought they knew better than God. I cannot help but be drawn to the actions of those who put themselves in the place of the Creator and instead of bringing forth new life, only brought forth more disaster.

Maybe this story isn't simply about Pharaoh and his hardened heart. Maybe it is about our hardened hearts as well. In uncertain times like the ones we are experiencing, none of us have all the answers and I am very leery of those who say that they do. Maybe this story about the plague of frogs is inviting us to take a look

at all the times when we as a society, as a culture, and yes even as people of faith, when we have put ourselves in the place of the Creator. And instead of bringing forth new life with our actions, we have only brought forth more disaster.

This story is confronting us with our own arrogance, confronting us with our own hubris. It is humbling us and reminding us that in all things, God is God and we are not. How many times have we said, “We were only trying to help” especially when we think we know more than anyone else, or that everything would fall apart if we did not get involved. Yet, these uncertain times are showing us what can happen, what does happen when we ignore the balance of things, when we become agents of chaos breaching the very laws which order Creation all around us. Hurricanes are becoming stronger and more dangerous. Storms across the Midwest are like nothing we have ever seen before. Fires are raging across the land, burning out of control. It is as if Creation itself is rebelling, sending more and more plagues our way.

It would be so easy for me to stand up here as the preacher and give the pat answer that this story is simply about showing us how powerful our God truly is. Yet, as we read about this plague of frogs, I wondered if there is not something more to it than an easy pat answer. Maybe, just maybe this story is really a reminder for all us that God is God and we are not. And it would be best for us and for all of Creation if we never ever forget that again. May it be so. Amen.