

“Disruption and Delay” - Oct 19, 2025 - Rev. Adam Hange

Exodus 1:15-21, NRSVUE - “The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 16 “When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.” 17 But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. 18 So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this and allowed the boys to live?” 19 The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” 20 So God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and became very strong. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.”

John 8:1-11, NRSVUE - “While Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and began to teach them. 3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and, making her stand before all of them, 4 they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. 5 Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” 6 They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” 8 And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. 9 When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. 10 Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” 11 She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

Opening Prayer

## Disruption and Delay

Exodus 1:15–21; John 8:1–11

Rev. Adam Hange — October 19, 2025

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Good morning, friends.

It's good to see you all again, after I was away for our church retreat last weekend.

I hope you took some time for rest as resistance this past week— remembering that rest, itself, can be a holy act of defiance in a world that demands our constant attention, production, and performance.

Today, we continue our series on Resistance is not futile, it's biblical... with the theme: "Disruption and Delay as Resistance."

We reflect on two stories from our scriptures — one from the book of Exodus, and one from John's Gospel — and see how ordinary people, used the quiet power of hesitation, disruption, and delay to resist systems of death and domination.

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### **The Midwives' Courage**

Our first story takes place in Egypt, long after Joseph's time. The Hebrew people had multiplied in a land not their own. They had worked, they had contributed, they had made a life there. But a new Pharaoh rose up — one who "did not remember Joseph."

That's how empire works. Memory fades fast when it's convenient. Gratitude turns into fear.

We read in Exodus ch. 1, how the new Pharaoh looked out over his land and saw these foreign-born laborers, these Hebrew immigrants, and decided there were too many of them. Too strong. Too different.

So he sought to oppress them. The more he oppressed them, the more they seemed to multiply and spread. (Exodus 1:12).

And so he issued a decree — a horrific executive order: to eliminate the problem, and the very moment of birth.

Into this terrifying moment, enter two women — Shiphrah and Puah — midwives.

We don't actually know whether they were Hebrew themselves or Egyptian midwives serving the Hebrews. What we do know is that **they feared God more than Pharaoh**. And that fear — that awe, that reverence and respect for the Source of life — made them courageous.

When the king **commanded them** to become his instruments of death, to kill every child born male, they found another way. They continued in their tasks of caring for mothers and delivering babies, but not exactly as ordered.

When Pharaoh demanded an explanation, they looked him in the eye and said:

*“Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before we arrive.”*

It's a cheeky answer, really. They played to Pharaoh's prejudices, telling him what he wanted to hear — and he believed them!

In truth, they had delayed. They disrupted the timing. They refused to obey a death-dealing order. And in doing so, they preserved life.

This was no small act of defiance. It took courage to lie to Pharaoh's face. And it took trust and coordination — because if one midwife had cracked, both would have been executed.

But they didn't crack. They stood together.  
They formed what we might call a sisterhood of resistance.

They used the tools available to them — time, words, solidarity — to make space, quite literally, for new life to enter the world.

Were it not for Shiprah and Puah, Moses might never have lived to deliver his people out of Egypt.

When laws are unjust, they remind us: Obedience is not the same as holiness.

And sometimes the most faithful thing you can do... is stall for time. Sometimes, to delay... is divine.

For as the Rev. Dr. King wrote in his "Letter from the Birmingham Jail,"

"An unjust law is no law at all."

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## **The Woman and the Sand**

Our second story begins generations later, amidst another crowd and another confrontation.

Jesus of Nazareth is teaching in the temple courts when a group of religious leaders interrupt him, dragging before him a woman who has been caught in adultery (a capital crime according to Levitical law).

Imagine this moment of commotion, the shouting, the looks of judgment and condemnation...

They make her stand before everyone and say,

“Teacher, this woman was caught **in the very act of adultery**.  
Now, the law of Moses commands us to stone such women.  
What do you say?”

But of course, you and I know, their aim is not justice — but... entrapment.

They want to corner Jesus, force him into a no-win scenario.

And notice: there’s no man brought forward. The law they cite names both the adulterer and the adulteress. ***It takes at least two to tango.***

But they only bring the woman.

Their real goal is humiliation and control.

And what does Jesus do? Notice...

He doesn’t argue.

He doesn’t shout.

He doesn’t leap into the fray like a superhero.

He quietly bends down and starts writing in the dirt.

We don’t know what he wrote — Scripture, maybe, or names, or sins, or maybe even doodles to defuse the tension. But whatever it was, this simple act ... broke the rhythm of violence.

It slowed things down... just enough...

The crowd's fever — their mob mentality — began to cool. They stopped shouting long enough to hear themselves think...

And then Jesus looks up and says the words that will echo for centuries:

*"Let the one among you ... who is without sin... cast the first stone."*

Then he looks down again... and keeps writing in the dust...

He gives them time to breathe. To think. To feel their own humanity again. And one by one — beginning with the elders — they drop their stones and walk away.

Jesus disrupted the mob's momentum.

He delayed their violence.

And in doing so, he saved a woman's life.

More than that, he saved those people *the moral injury* of committing such a terrible act against their neighbor.

It wasn't just a miracle — it was **a strategy**.

Jesus practiced courage, calm, and creativity in the face of chaos.

One the members of our Bible study said it reminded them of that scene in Harper Lee's book, *To Kill a Mockingbird* — when young Scout interrupts a lynch mob by calling out the men by name.

Her small voice breaks through their collective rage and reminds them of who they are — fathers, neighbors, people with hearts.

That's what Jesus does here.

He doesn't overpower the mob — he re-humanizes them.

He deftly disrupts their violence, just long enough for conscience to catch up.

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## **Disruption and Delay as Faithful Tactics**

Disruption and delay are not passive acts. They are the time-tested tools of prophets and peacemakers. They are tactics of the Spirit.

Rosa Parks disrupted the system when she refused to give up her seat. The Montgomery bus boycott disrupted and delayed the racial and economic system of segregation.

César Chávez delayed the grape harvest through labor strikes and fasting, giving farmworkers a chance to be seen as fully human. The Delano grape boycott took 5 years, and a 300 mile pilgrimage.

The “Sanctuary Movement” of the 1980s sheltered Central Americans fleeing war and violence, delaying their deportations long enough for families to find safety and for justice to take root.

Even today, activists chain themselves to trees in front of bulldozers or make camp in the way of pipelines, calling it an act of prayer — holy resistance for the sake of life.

These acts of disruption and delay are creative, risky, and deeply spiritual.

Of course, not all disruption is holy. We know that too.

We see it when power is used to stall progress, or when delays are used to maintain control — like in government shutdowns that harm workers and families while leaders play politics.

A government shutdown doesn’t happen by accident. It is a strategy.

So how do we tell whether this strategy is being used for good or ill?

Jesus gives us the test:

***“You will know them by their fruits.”***

If an act of disruption protects the vulnerable, if it buys time for mercy, if it makes room for life to thrive — then it is holy.

If, on the other hand, it deepens suffering, allows the powerful to hoard still more power, or feeds on the fear of others — then, you know, it is not of God.

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## **Living It Today**

Shiphrah and Puah knew that resistance sometimes looks like slowing down the machinery of death.

Jesus knew that mercy sometimes looks like bending low, writing in the sand, *and waiting* for hearts to soften.

And today — in our own time — we are called to the same kind of spiritual and prophetic imagination.

Sometimes our resistance will look dramatic: standing up, speaking out, marching for justice with our signs held high!

And ***sometimes...*** it will look quieter: waiting, pausing, pray-ing, delay-ing — just long enough for a word of truth and life to surface.

Maybe for you, disruption looks like refusing to be silent in the face of cruelty.

Or refusing to rush to judgment. Or taking a Sabbath rest in a culture that says your worth is your attention and activity.

Disruption and delay can happen in a boardroom, a courtroom, a classroom, or around your dinner table.

They can happen anywhere someone decides that fear or violence **will not** have the final word.

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## **Conclusion**

Make no mistake, the way of Jesus... is the way of Life — not domination.

It's not about winning arguments or even overpowering the oppressor.

It's about disrupting cycles of harm, disarming the systems of oppression, so that something new, something tender, something just can be born.

When kings command, when mobs form, when systems crush — our still speaking God whispers:

“Delay them. Disrupt them. Make space for life to thrive.”

That's what the midwives did.

That's what Jesus did.

And that's what we can do — in our time, in our place, with whatever courage and creativity God has given us.

So may we, like the midwives, Shiprah and Puah, and Christ our Brother, Teacher, and Friend, remember to resist — not with hate or haste, but with calm, compassion, creativity, and love.

May we delay what destroys, and make room for all that brings life.

May it be so!