

"15 minute sermon"  
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Salem United Methodist Church  
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**Scripture Reading:** Exodus 1:8-2:10; Psalm 124; Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20

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**Sermon title:** "It's all in the basket"

As most of you know, I look at things a little differently. My peculiar way of reacting to what I observe is key to how I do my professional work in business data processing, particularly my attention to details. Bring the details on, the more, the better. Throw in conflicting objectives, some misaligned personalities and I manage to sort everything out. To me, details are everything. They are not to be brushed aside, but understood. For some reason my mind loves detail, while allowing me to see the big picture at the same time.

So when I started preparing for today's message, reading all 4 scriptures in the assigned Lectionary, one detail caught my eye that I had to find more about: the basket that Moses was put in before his sister put him in the Nile River. I hope you examine that basket with me, and see its relationship to all of the scripture in today's Lectionary readings, yes all 4 of them. Thanks to Mindy who put the PowerPoint together. I hope your fingers did not fall off typing in all of the lectionary scripture. And Lisa, thank you for your patience to read all of it.

Before we get into the scripture, let's look at baskets and how they were used in the ancient world. Per Wikipedia the oldest known baskets date back some 12,000 years. My [Unger's Bible Dictionary](#), an important part of my library, gives some insight to their use during Old Testament times. First, baskets were easily made with the natural materials of the area. You can use twigs, palm leaves, papyrus, willow bark, and really any fibrous plant to make them of any particular size, to fit almost any function. In the tombs of the Pharaoh's archeologists have found bread baskets. Baskets made for fruit were common, and are spoken of in the Old Testament. Much like the native peoples of Alaska who do not have one word for snow, but a couple of dozen as it was so much a part of their daily existence; from what I read the Hebrew people have 4 or 5 separate words for basket.

Now, we have to deal with a little bit of "lost in translation" from Hebrew to English. The Hebrew used here to describe the basket Moses is in is not one of their normal basket words. It is "Tevah". It is the same word used to describe Noah's Ark in the book of Genesis, and these are the only 2 references of "Tevah" in the Old Testament. In verse 3 we see that the mother of Moses took a papyrus basket and covered it with tar and pitch. If you look at Genesis 6:14, the story of Noah's Ark, he too covered the ark with pitch, inside and outside to keep its contents dry.

In both stories involving the “Tevah” it is the intention to keep their contents safe. Noah’s Ark faced the greatest storm on Earth for 40 days and 40 nights. Moses’ trip on the Nile probably only lasted a few minutes. His journey ended well and he found shelter with the daughter of the Pharaoh. Moses, in a sense, became a new Noah – a person of faith, destined for great leadership and responsibility. His basket ride and interception by Pharaoh’s daughter kept Moses from being killed by the order of the Pharaoh.

So what caused the Pharaoh to react so violently against new born male Hebrew children? Per verse 8 he is a new king... and scholars believe that he was the one who overthrew the prior regime, a regime dominated by Semitic people. He wanted less outside influence, so he committed one of the first recorded acts of anti-Semitism, less they overpower by sheer numbers the people of Egypt.

As we know, it was Moses who led the people out of Egypt, from under the rule of the Pharaoh to the entrance of the Promised Land.... and it started with his being put into a basket on the Nile. I hope to show in the rest of the message today that we all need to be in our basket, a basket provided by God as we journey on the sometimes turbulent river of life.

So let’s turn to Psalm 124, particularly the first 5 verses. The Psalmist is asking the faithful of Israel to remember how God protected them when they were under attack by their enemies. There is mention of how God provided shelter from the raging flood and torrents that could have been Israel’s fate. There is thankfulness of not being swallowed alive in the storm. The Psalmist is figuratively in the basket, a basket of protection, a basket of promises from God, a basket of appreciation.

The reading from Romans tells us we are not in the basket alone. We are a community of faith and we should be living sacrifices to Christ. Paul urges us to not conform to the world’s standard, but have a transformed mind whose focus is on Christ. We need to be humble servants, who work cooperatively – each with our own strengths, each with our own weaknesses, each with our own special gifts. We should do this with joy in our hearts, joy in Christ.

Now, back to my obsession with detail: Let’s look at the structure of a basket. [HOLD UP THE BASKET]. Do you see what gives a basket its strength? It is a fabric of flexible fibers. Each fiber in and of itself is not strong enough to hold contents, but put them together with the intertwining of many fibers, alternating horizontal and vertical and you end up with a ridged structure. There is not any glue holding this together, just a few nails securing some loose ends. Look how strong it is. [HOLD IT UP AND PRESS ON IT] I can push, pull and compress the basket, but it keeps its strength and shape. The whole is clearly greater than the sum of its parts. This is what Paul is talking about. We need to embrace the

diversity of gifts each of us brings to this house of worship, and we need to be cheerful in doing so.

Now, there is a new basket, it is Christ himself. Christ was baptized in water and is our protector for this frequently turbulent life on Earth. It is difficult keeping the faith during those rough times. Even the disciples were frightened during the storm on the Sea of Galilee, when Peter stepped out of the boat. The basket of Christ has a lot of room in it for those that believe. It is a safe basket, guaranteed not to sink, but you have to stay in the basket, living the life called for by Paul in his book to Romans.

The gospel scripture today reveals that Peter is in the basket of Christ. He is blunt and to the point when asked by Jesus "Who do you say I am?" Christ goes on to say that he will build his church on such faith. His basket will always be big enough for those who accept Christ to live in their hearts. It will always have enough tar and pitch to keep the storms of life at bay.

[PAUSE]

So, are you in the basket? Are your feet firmly attached to the tar and pitch in the bottom of the basket so you will not fall out when the river of life hits dangerous rapids? If not, you are welcome to come back. We will even give you a hand to help you get back into the basket. There is nothing to fear, but bring your talents with you to do God's work on this Earth. Moses started out in the basket as an innocent baby, but with love and protection became a great leader of the Hebrew people. Like the Psalmist give thanks to God for your protection in his basket, a basket of love, faith and forgiveness. Be a living sacrifice as Paul encouraged the people of Rome. Share your talent God has given you. Stand on the firm foundation as related by Peter in the gospel lesson today.

I wonder if instead of being in the basket, each of us should be part of the basket fabric – an individual fiber – effectively the basket itself, that protects the basket contents. The gifts we bring are unique, though as individuals are not enough to build a church. This basket is very strong due to its interlocking structure of weak individual fibers. We can be strong by working together building the basket for Salem, Wisconsin that God wants us to build. Take a look around at your fellow fibers of our basket. Please look around. What talents do you see around you? I see fund raisers, greeters, administrators, secretaries, maintainers of the property, singers, players of instruments, music directors, teachers, candle lighters, gardeners, accountants, lawn mowers, historians, attendance takers, chefs, students, janitors, keepers of the sanctuary, servers of our greater community, counters of our donations, parents raising their children in the faith, multi-media presenters, committee members, committee chairpersons, worship participants, visitors, preachers, even pew warmers or some combination of the above. Did I leave anybody out? Each of us is a fiber in the basket we call Salem United Methodist Church. It does not matter if you are one of the horizontal or vertical fibers: We are trying to do Christ's work on this Earth until we are called home. We can provide the spiritual and emotional support for those

who need it. We can take care of those who are in the basket, those seeking support during the difficult struggles of life.

So consider what fiber you are in this fabric we call the basket of Salem United Methodist Church. Let's build a strong basket, one capable of holding our community in a loving and positive way, as Christ guides us. We are not the infants that Moses was – where the basket protected him. We are responsible individuals. Be the fiber of the basket Christ directs you to be as we lead our lives of faith, worship and action. Collectively, we do make a difference.

[PAUSE]

Never, never, never look at a basket [HOLD IT UP] the same way again. Amen

## **Prayer Concerns**

### **Benediction:**

Let us go out into the world motivated by the good news that Christ is our new life. Be the basket of Christ not just here in Salem, Wisconsin, but everywhere we go. Offer help. Give love, be involved. May the grace, love and peace of Jesus Christ be with all of you, now and forever. Go in peace, knowing we have a new life in Christ to do his will on Earth. Amen.