

## **“Drawn Out to Defend”**

Exodus 2:11-21

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Have any of you ever watched the Francis Ford Coppola 1983 movie version of the S.E. Hinton novel “The Outsiders”? This is the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century story, you may well recall, of the “school of hard-knocks” gang known as the Greasers, and the more “carefree lives of privilege” gang known as the Socs. The official tag line for the flick was, *“They grew up on the outside of society. They weren’t looking for a fight. They were looking to belong.”*

The “they” being referenced to here are the Greasers. More specifically, I believe, it directs our attention to two of the more meekly-mannered Greasers named Johnny Cade and Ponyboy Curtis.

The fight found Johnny and Ponyboy when two Soc leaders happen upon them and decide to remind them of their lowly place in the social pecking order. This was done through a severe beating. So severe, in fact, that Ponyboy is nearly drowned to death in a park fountain. I say “nearly” because the brutal attack triggered young Johnny to rise up in defense, switchblade in hand. As a result, he saves Ponyboy’s life by ending the life of one of the attacking Soc leaders. As true a fictional case, perhaps, of justifiable homicide we are likely to read of.

With blood circulating around the cleansing waters of the fountain, Johnny and Ponyboy go on an exodus from the law. They hop a freight train in order to find their way to a safe house they’d been directed to by one of the older Greasers.

I love the way Coppola frames this happening. It’s been too long since I’ve read the book, so perhaps he was following the author’s description. In any event, the camera fades from a freight train silhouetted by a sunset right into an early dawn revealing of the safe house. When we realize this safe house is an abandoned church, it makes us appreciate the true meaning of sanctuary. And the fact that it is a safe house -- a sanctuary, a place apart from world-bred violence -- for wild things is made clear when the camera shows a rabbit hutch underneath a broken down pew as well as a barn owl situated on a rafter right above it. Owls, you know, eat rabbits. So the symbolism of both of them peacefully coexisting in the same place is quite powerful of what was *not* happening between the Greasers and the Socs.

While in this safe house, this church gone to wrack and ruin turned true sanctuary, Johnny

and Ponyboy realize their friendship runs deeper than they ever knew. Mostly, they discover that they both have an interest in beautiful things not ordinarily noticed in the violent, oppressive world they'd run from. This hope of beauty trumping brutality is most poignantly unveiled while the two watch a sunrise and wonder if the hope it represents can last.

This more contemporary epic story calls to mind another epic story – another story, an ancient one at that, born of social injustice and the violence it so readily breeds. It too is a story of the struggle for deliverance from oppression, a story centering in large part on a homicidal confrontation between two people. It is the story we hear and read in the second chapter of the Book of Exodus.

Have you ever noticed that this part of Moses' story tends to get skipped over? We have no trouble reviewing the saving of baby Moses in a papyrus boat. We have no trouble then skipping ahead to Moses being somehow spoken to by God in a burning bush. But we don't often pause to reflect on Moses the young man who slain an Egyptian slave driver and hid the body in the sand. Yet we suffer a sure and certain spiritual poverty if we glance over this formative happening in Moses' life. We cannot overlook the fact that the exodus from oppression born of his leadership was birthed in the blood and mud and mayhem of that life-changing day in his life.

Let me be clear. Moses, a full-blooded Hebrew who happened to be raised an Egyptian Prince, did not just wake-up one day with murder on his mind. He did wake-up and see yet another day of his fellow Hebrews suffering severe forced labor under the thumb of his step-grandfather of sorts, the Pharaoh. And while there is only so much witnessing of inhumanity one can let continue before feeling compelled to do something about it, we are not told in the Scripture that he had some sort of premeditated plan to make a stand or a statement. No, what Moses did was step-up and step-in to stop a murder taking place.

The translation found in our pew Bible's says, too softly, that he saw an Egyptian "beating" a Hebrew slave. This wasn't a punch or two. It was a brutal, life-endangering attack. We know this because the original language found in this verse of Exodus is more strongly and correctly translated to read that Moses witnessed the slave being "killed."

So Moses was drawn directly into the conflict by a deep compassion to defend, to deliver from death, his true kinfolk. May we not overlook the fact that the exodus of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt had its genesis in Moses' own personal exodus – an exodus from the privileged social life and ruling class he'd known, an exodus from the guilt of seeing his true kinfolk enslaved, an exodus from the contract on his life ordered by Pharaoh once the deadly deed became widely known.

And what is the first thing we learn about Moses doing on his personal exodus once he arrived in the safe sanctuary of the more peaceful, pastoral land of Midian? Did his compassion for his people evaporate into easy living? Of course not. Oppression exists in all places and on all levels of the social ladder. In old Midian, if you happened to be a woman it was going to be your task to fetch well-water. And if you happened to be there when gruff, grungy shepherd men showed up, you were going to be put down and pushed aside. However, had you happened to be there the day Moses, the exiled Prince of Egypt appeared, you would have been defended in full. And so it went, thus marking the beginning of a new life, with a new family for Moses.

What would you do to defend your family? Your faith? Heroes, it seems to me, are seldom self-appointed. They are drawn out through a life and death conflict. And so if the body-burying Moses we meet at the beginning of Exodus Chapter Two seems like someone you can't relate to, or you'd rather ignore in favor of skipping ahead to the burning bush, I invite you to think again.

We are heirs of Moses example. In scholarly terms, he is called a "kinsfolk redeemer." This means God worked redemption for the Hebrews through the life and works of Moses. The redemption was from both worldly and spiritual slavery. As Christians, our kinsfolk redeemer, our "Moses," the One who redeemed us by first living through his own person exodus from immense power, is, of course, God's Son, Jesus. For the sake of all God's children, of the lineage of Moses or not, Jesus was drawn out of the waters of his mother's womb, drawn out of the waters of the Jordan River, drawn out to the Sea of Galilee. He was drawn out to defend and deliver.

As heirs of Moses and of Jesus, all of us have also been drawn out to defend our family, our faith, our family of faith. We've been drawn out to defend against injustice. We've been drawn out to defend against the wages of sin. We've been drawn out for the purpose of being delivered and being deliverers to the Promised Land.

We symbolize this being drawn out of the conflict between life and death through the Sacrament of Baptism. Whenever there is a baptism, it is heroic. It is a holy action from the heart and hand of God to draw forth heirs of Moses and Jesus from the cleansing waters. Chosen thus, we nurture one another as defenders of the faith, the faith that defends the oppressed and delivers all to the wholeness and holiness that is ours as children of God.

I love watching the works of great directors, don't you? Especially when their works tell the saga of brutality begetting beauty, of heartache harboring great hope. We have many great human directors who tell such tales. But the greatest director of all things, of all life stories, is God. What

scene are you in today? What scenes are you being summoned to for the sake of your world-wide faith family? Amen.