Scripture Reading: Exodus 2:1–10
Sermon Title: The Fragrance of a Woman / Translator: Ka-Eun Julian

1. Reformation

The last Sunday of October is traditionally observed as Reformation Sunday in the Christian church. This observance commemorates an event that took place on October 31, 1517. It began with a seemingly small act, yet it had an enormous impact. On that day, Martin Luther posted his *Ninety-Five Theses*, written in Latin, on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. The document, titled *Disputatio*, meaning “disputation” or “debate,” sparked the Protestant Reformation, one of the most powerful and transformative movements of resistance in Christian history. Luther's intention was to challenge the church's departure from the truth and call it back to the right direction. He believed that the church needed to change its course.

But what is reformation? The Korean word for reformation, gaehyeok (개혁), combines two Chinese characters: gae (改), meaning “to change” or “to correct,” and hyeok (革), meaning “hide” or “leather.” Animal hides cannot be used as leather products in their original state. The hair must be removed, the hide must be softened through tanning, and it must be treated and colored before it can be made into something useful. In other words, transformation is necessary.

I would define reformation as change for the sake of truth and freedom. Even small changes that move us toward what is more right and more good can be acts of reformation. I once heard about a man who entered college and saw the school's motto engraved on a large stone on campus: “The truth will set you free.” He began to wonder, “What is truth? And what is freedom?” Eventually, he came to one simple realization: whatever enslaves me cannot be the truth, and whatever sets me free must be connected to the truth.

Luther, too, sought to bring about reform because he did not want believers to be improperly bound and confined. He wanted them to experience the freedom that comes through the truth. A small change, a small step toward truth and freedom, helped ignite the fire of the Reformation. When Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses, he probably could not have imagined the enormous consequences that would follow. How could he have known that one small document would shake the entire Christian world? He was simply taking a small step of obedience to God in an area where he believed change was needed.

Today's Scripture tells a similar story. Three women appear in this passage. Their actions may seem small and ordinary. One gave birth to a child and raised him. Another watched over him. And another rescued him from the water. That is all they did. Yet, together with the story of the Hebrew midwives we encountered last week, these women's seemingly small acts occupy the opening chapters of Exodus, the biblical account of God's great work of deliverance. Sometimes, the great work of God begins with the smallest acts of faithfulness.

2. The Birth of an Extraordinary Child

Moses is about to enter the stage of history in a remarkable way. The story begins simply. A man from the tribe of Levi married a woman who also belonged to the tribe of Levi, and she gave birth to a son. At this point in Israel's history, the Levites had not yet become the priestly tribe we know them to be later. Among the twelve tribes descended from the twelve sons of

Jacob, they were not yet a particularly prominent family. And yet, Moses was born into this seemingly ordinary household. There was something extraordinary about this child.
Our Korean Bible translates the description of the child as “beautiful.” The Hebrew word is *tov*, which means “good,” “pleasing,” “excellent,” or “fine.” It is the same word used in Genesis when God looked at His creation and declared that it was good. The NIV translates the description as “fine,” while the KJV uses “goodly.” The implication is that this was no ordinary child. Moses was apparently an exceptionally beautiful and captivating baby. Perhaps we human beings have a strange tendency: when we hear that a child is beautiful, we feel even more heartbroken at the thought of that child's suffering.
Pharaoh had issued a terrifying decree: Every Hebrew boy who was born was to be thrown into the Nile River. Yet Moses' parents could not bring themselves to do it. Why? They loved their beautiful child and could not bear to let him die. So they hid him for three months. But as the baby grew, it became increasingly difficult to keep him concealed. Eventually, his parents decided to entrust his life to God's providence. They made a basket out of papyrus reeds and coated it with tar and pitch to make it waterproof. Then they placed the baby inside and set the basket among the reeds along the Nile.
The Hebrew word translated as “basket” is *tevah* (תֵּבָה), the same word used for the ark that Noah built. Just as Noah and his family were carried in the ark through the waters so that humanity could have a new beginning, Moses was placed in a *tevah* as he began his journey toward becoming the instrument through whom God would bring about a new act of deliverance.
What would become of baby Moses? His mother, Jochebed, could not bear to send him away without knowing what would happen to him. So she sent his older sister, Miriam, to follow the basket and see what would become of him. And so Moses drifted along the Nile, entrusted to God's providence, heading toward a destination no one could have imagined.

3. The One Who Was Rescued

At just the right moment, Pharaoh's daughter came down to the Nile to bathe. It seems that Moses' story was not destined to end in death after all. Pharaoh's daughter discovered the basket and sent her attendants to retrieve it. Perhaps the basket had a lid, because when she opened it, the baby was suddenly exposed to the light and began to cry. Human beings have what are called mirror neurons, which help us respond to the emotions and actions of others. When we see someone crying, we often feel moved to cry ourselves. That is why, when one little child begins to cry, other children may soon start crying, too. People who are unable to empathize with the suffering of others are often described as lacking empathy or compassion. Thankfully, Pharaoh's daughter was not indifferent to the suffering before her. When she saw the crying baby, she felt compassion for him. And this was a Hebrew baby!
How did she know he was Hebrew? The practice of circumcision, established among Abraham's descendants, provided a distinguishing sign for Hebrew boys. The baby was identified as one of the Hebrew children whom Pharaoh had ordered to be killed. This was the moment when Moses' sister needed to act. We do not know exactly how old Miriam was, but she showed remarkable courage and intelligence. She approached an Egyptian princess and spoke to her. Imagine how much courage that required! In those days, Hebrew slaves would hardly have dared to approach a member of Pharaoh's royal household, much less speak directly to the princess. But Miriam had only one thing on her mind: somehow, she had to save her little

brother's life. She asked the princess whether she should go and find a Hebrew woman who could nurse the baby. The princess agreed. And whom did Miriam bring back? Her own mother, Jochebed—the baby's mother. In that moment, the mother became the child's nurse, and a mother who had feared losing her son was given the opportunity to care for him once again. The baby Moses, whose fate had seemed to rest entirely in the hands of others, was now able to live under the protection of Pharaoh's own daughter.Pharaoh's daughter named him Moses.
The name is associated with the Hebrew verb *mashah* (מָשָׁה), meaning “to draw out,” as reflected in Exodus 2:10: “I drew him out of the water.” The name Moses therefore recalls the one who was drawn out of the water—a child rescued from death, who would one day become God's instrument for drawing an entire people out of slavery.
I also have a little story about being someone who was rescued.There was a time when my family considered whether I should have the English name Moses. This happened when I was around three or four years old, so I have no memory of it myself. In those days, people did not have washing machines in every home. In our neighborhood, people went to the stream to wash their clothes. The flowing water was ideal for rinsing laundry. One day, my mother was at the stream, working hard as she beat the family's laundry with a wooden washing paddle. Our family was large, and there was plenty of laundry to do. She was so focused on washing clothes that she did not realize her little child had fallen into deep water. Fortunately, a man from the neighborhood happened to pass by. He saw a small child spinning in the water, jumped in, and pulled me out. That is how I survived. So, wouldn't I qualify as someone who has been rescued, too? Just as Moses was drawn out of the water, I, too, was rescued from the water. And perhaps that is a reminder that our lives are not simply the result of our own efforts. Sometimes, we are alive today because someone noticed us, cared enough to act, and reached out a hand to save us.

4. A Sensitivity to Life
Despite Pharaoh's absolute command, the person who disobeyed him was none other than his own daughter. Sometimes, the greatest dangers to a powerful system come from within. The cracks in the Egyptian empire were beginning to appear through the quiet resistance of someone inside the royal household. And what began to undermine the empire? It was a heart filled with compassion. The princess's act of compassion was a small change in direction, a small movement toward freedom for someone who was being oppressed. Yet that small act would eventually help bring about a transformation that shook the course of history. Without the compassion in Pharaoh's daughter's heart, the Exodus might not have unfolded in the same way. Her heart was filled with pity and mercy. There is a Korean expression, bulinjisim which describes a heart that cannot bear to see another suffer—a heart that refuses to stand by when someone is in pain. It is the feeling that makes us say, “I simply cannot let this happen.” It is the compassion that prevents us from treating a human being, a person created in the image of God, as though that person were merely an animal to be discarded. Pharaoh did not regard the Hebrew people as human beings deserving of dignity. He treated them as though their lives were disposable. Yet even when animals are killed, a compassionate human heart may feel sorrow. How much more should we grieve when a human life is threatened? Pharaoh's daughter was a woman who could respond to the cries of a baby. She possessed the kind of

heart that could not bear to see another suffer. For God's dream to become a reality in history, human beings must respond in obedience to Him.
In today's story, God's dream of deliverance moves forward because three women responded with compassion and took action. They were Moses' mother, Jochebed; his sister, Miriam; and Pharaoh's daughter. What did these three women have in common? First, they were women. But more importantly, they all possessed a deep sensitivity to life. They cared about someone who was vulnerable and excluded. They valued a life that the powerful had deemed unworthy of protection. They remind us of the kind of person Jesus described in the parable of the lost sheep: someone who leaves the ninety-nine sheep behind to search for the one that is lost. These are people who feel the pain of those who have been abandoned. They are people who respond sensitively to the value of every life. Through people with such hearts, God's dream continues to unfold in this world today.

5. The Sensitivity of Women
Throughout history, a harsh, macho form of masculinity has often driven the world toward destruction and ruin. By contrast, the sensitivity of women toward life has often helped heal the world and make it a warmer, more livable place. I am not saying that women are good and men are bad. Rather, I am pointing to two contrasting ways of exercising power and relating to others. A world dominated by testosterone-driven aggression has often produced violence that destroys humanity and oppresses people created in the image of God. By contrast, a world shaped by the nurturing qualities we often associate with femininity—compassion, mercy, and tenderness—can help heal the wounds of such destruction. Even Jesus embodied both strength and tenderness. Jesus was certainly not afraid to confront injustice. He stood firmly against falsehood and challenged corrupt religious systems. Remember how He overturned the tables of those exchanging money and conducting unfair business in the temple courts? He demonstrated courage, conviction, and righteous anger. Yet Jesus was also filled with profound compassion. When He saw the crowds growing hungry in the wilderness, He had compassion on them and performed the miracle of feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. And because He had compassion on us, He willingly bore the cross and sacrificed Himself for our salvation. In Jesus, strength and tenderness were not opposites. They worked together in perfect harmony. Beloved brothers and sisters, I believe that salvation begins with a heart that embraces others, makes room for them, empathizes with their suffering, and responds with compassion. This is why the opening chapters of Exodus, which introduce the story of the Exodus, portray women playing such a central role in God's work of delivering Israel. Before Moses confronts Pharaoh, before the plagues descend upon Egypt, and before the Israelites walk through the Red Sea, there are women who choose to protect life.
There is a mother who refuses to abandon her child, a sister who watches over her brother, and a princess who responds with compassion rather than obedience to a cruel command. Before the great public events of salvation unfold, there is a quiet, personal act of mercy. And through these ordinary acts, the story of deliverance begins. The devotion of women who give birth, nurture children, and prepare meals may appear insignificant in the eyes of the world. Yet such devotion can be profoundly important—even instrumental in God's work of saving and transforming humanity. The household chores you do at home are not meaningless. Think about it. Without cooking, doing laundry, cleaning, and washing dishes day after day, could a

household function? Without your countless acts of devotion, how could children grow and thrive as they do? What if one of the children you have nurtured grows up to become a servant of God like Moses? What could be more wonderful than that?
I believe that God is still raising up servants like Moses today, preparing people through whom He will carry forward His plan of redemption and advance His kingdom. And those who nurture and raise such people are often women whose labor goes unnoticed. The work and devotion of women deserve more appreciation than we could ever express. Never underestimate the power of what you do every day. God may be working through your ordinary acts of love to prepare someone for an extraordinary calling.

6. Katharina von Bora (1499–1552)
Let me introduce you to a woman who often remained in the shadow of the great Reformer Martin Luther: his wife, Katharina von Bora. Katharina was a nun in a Cistercian convent. The Cistercian order was known for its rigorous discipline and reforming spirit, building upon the Benedictine tradition while emphasizing a stricter observance of monastic life. Yet Katharina came to believe that further change was necessary. She and several other nuns eventually escaped from the convent. In the same year that she left the convent, she married Martin Luther and established a household with him.
Luther and his family lived in a former Augustinian monastery in Wittenberg. The household also accommodated theologians and students who shared Luther's convictions. Together, they discussed his reforming ideas and nurtured a vision of what God was doing through the Reformation. Their conversations around the table, known as *Table Talk*, became an important part of the intellectual and spiritual life of the Reformation. Ideas were explored, refined, and shared through these everyday conversations. A swan may appear to glide effortlessly across a pond, but beneath the surface, its feet are paddling furiously. Likewise, while Luther became an influential Reformer who spread his ideas through preaching, teaching, writing, and public debate, his wife's support was indispensable to the life and work that made much of this possible. The Reformation began in the pulpit, but it was also sustained and put into practice at the dining table. Katharina devoted herself to managing a household filled with family members, relatives, and students. She cultivated the land to produce food, operated a brewery to generate income, and took responsibility for providing lodging and meals for students. She willingly shouldered an enormous amount of work. While Luther advanced the Reformation through theological study, teaching, preaching, and writing, Katharina embodied its practical implications through the way she lived each day. Her life may have appeared ordinary and unremarkable, but it was within that ordinary life that the work of reform continued to take shape.
We must not overlook this truth: God's work is not carried forward only through great sermons and public declarations. It is also sustained through the faithful work of everyday life.

Have you ever heard the expression, “Making everyday life an act of reformation, and making reformation part of everyday life”? You may be hearing it for the first time because it is an expression I have coined myself. The Reformation does not begin only when we undertake some grand project to change the world. It begins when we allow God to transform the ordinary details of our lives. Try adding a little love to the small things you do every day. Season your daily routines with compassion and mercy. As you speak to your family, care for your neighbors,

serve your church, and respond to those in need, allow love to shape your actions. Reformation begins with small things. It begins with a small change of direction toward freedom. And that is where the transformation of the world begins.

Conclusion: The Fragrance That Changes the World

Hidden within the gentleness, sacrifice, and tender-hearted tolerance often associated with women is a precious pearl of salvation. If we imagine God in His justice as a stern father, we may also need to recover the biblical imagery of God as a loving mother, whose compassion nurtures and sustains life. Perhaps this image of a motherly God is precisely what our churches need to recover in this generation. Dear sisters in Christ, God remembers your quiet acts of service and devotion. Through people like you, who may appear gentle, weak, or insignificant in the eyes of the world, God will accomplish His extraordinary plans of salvation. Do not give up the service and love you have faithfully offered. Keep going. Continue to love, continue to serve, and continue to care for those around you. Through these simple acts, God's kingdom will continue to advance powerfully. The kingdom of God is not built only through extraordinary achievements. It is also built through ordinary people doing ordinary things with extraordinary love. I believe that God's kingdom takes shape right where you are, through people whom the world may overlook and through the small acts of faithfulness that fill your everyday lives. So go into this new week with courage and confidence. Continue to live faithfully in the place where God has called you. Continue to offer your love, your compassion, and your service. You may never know how far the fragrance of your kindness will travel or how many lives will be touched by it. But remember this: a small act of compassion can change the course of a life, and a life changed by compassion can become part of God's great work of redemption. Just as Jochebed, Miriam, and Pharaoh's daughter became part of God's plan through their seemingly small actions, God can work through you, too. May the fragrance of your love fill your homes, your church, and this world. And may God use your everyday acts of faithfulness to bring His kingdom to life. Amen.

Small Group Discussion Questions

Small Acts of Kindness and God's Work: Even a small act of kindness or empathy can become part of God's work in history. How can we put this truth into practice in our own lives? Share a specific example of how you might show compassion to someone this week.

Everyday Life and the Kingdom of God: Based on today's sermon, what is the relationship between the seemingly insignificant tasks of everyday life and the building of God's kingdom? How might our daily routines, family responsibilities, and quiet acts of service become meaningful expressions of God's love?