

Ten, powerful plagues have come and gone and have done what they were supposed to do- that is, to convince Pharaoh to let God's people go! The last of the plagues culminated in the first Passover, when the angel of death passed over the houses and killed all first-born males whose house didn't have lamb's blood smeared on their doorposts and the beams across their doors. The Israelites ate what is known as the Passover meal- lamb along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. These widespread deaths happened under Pharaoh's watch and this time Pharaoh's own son died- even the first-born animals of the Egyptians died. Pharaoh immediately called for Moses and his brother, Aaron, and said, "Get up! Get away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go! Worship the Lord, as you said! You can even take your flocks and herds. Just go" (12:31-32)! Meanwhile the Israelites didn't think twice and fled from Egypt, with Moses, as God leads them all by the roundabout way of the Reed (or Red) Sea desert. "Moses took with him Joseph's bones, just as Joseph had made Israel's sons promise when he said to them, 'When God takes care of you, you must carry my bones out of here with you'" (13:19). Bones and all, Moses and the Israelites head out of Egypt but while they're leaving, God hardened Pharaoh's heart again, and Pharaoh changed his mind. He does a 180 and rallies 600 chariots (vv. 5-9) with captains over every one of them and additional troops to chase after the Israelites. Pharaoh had the best military resources of the day, as chariots were the most sophisticated military technology available at that time. Israel had nothing except their boldness and faith. Y'all know the story. Pharaoh's army catches up to the Israelites at their seaside campground. Hooves

pound the dirt and the Israelites cry out in fear. They seemed to have no chance to escape and/or survive. Did God lead them into what seemed to be a trap?! And this is where we pick up in today's story, which leads up to one of the most well-known miracle stories in the Bible. The very act that is the very name "exodus." Exodus 14 may just be "the most important chapter in the entire Old Testament. The story of God's deliverance of the Israelites from Pharaoh's massive army at the Red Sea is the bedrock of the covenant relationship between God and the people, Israel" (workingpreacher.org, Cameron Howard). This is the Lord's victory and the Lord's alone. Before we turn to God's word for us this day, let us first **PRAY. READ. Exodus 14:10-16; 31.**

The Israelites thought they were a free people but were trapped between Egypt's superior army on their fancy chariots and the impassable Red Sea. They could not escape the situation they were in. They had hoped years ago and their hope is wavering. Yet, they had enough courage and trust to get this far on their journey to freedom. Now they are terrified and their grumbling begins. They could at least still have food to eat had they stayed in Egypt as slaves but now?! This is poignant and real, as we all know of those times in our own lives where we choose to stay in a bad situation or with a bad habit for fear that it will be worse to go and face the unknown. Have you ever been stuck between a rock and a hard place? Have you ever been backed up between the Red Sea and a warring army or enemy? You know- two bad choices and neither look good. This is such a helpless and hopeless place to be, isn't it?! Do I put them on life support or let nature take her

course? Do I pay my electric bill or buy my medicine this month? Do I sleep here behind this building and chance getting arrested or do I sleep where my stuff can be stolen again? You know those times when we are unable to dream of a new reality. Where hope just makes one more depressed? Where fear controls our actions or inactions. Often it is fear that holds us back from embracing new life and opportunities for our future. You see a little hope or belief that something is going to change is required to leave- to have an ending that welcomes a new beginning. Once you allow yourself to believe something is possible you risk losing that hope if you leave for the unknown.

But God has plans nobody could have predicted. God cleared a dry path through the sea. God makes a way out of no way- fighting for justice to defeat oppression. “Death, salvation/liberation and creation are intricately woven together. In this story, death becomes the conduit of salvation and re-creation of the Israelites” (Ericka Dunbar, WP). Look at the cross. In today’s story and in our stories, “where we don’t see a way forward, God makes a way through the sea so that we can emerge from death to life” (workingpreacher.org, podcast). In Cole Arthur Riley’s book, *This Here Flesh, (by the way she is speaking at Furman’s Daniel Chapel on Nov. 7th at 6:30*, Riley wisely claims that “when someone has endured bondage for so long and has still found some manner of survival, they may assess the risk of liberation to be greater than the violence of their chains. When one has gone without food for so long, their stomach becomes used to smaller portions. If one has gone without a roof over their head, once you have one you may be less

inclined to tell the landlord that it's leaking. In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison famously writes, 'Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another. In pursuit of liberation, we do not need to pine after the power of our oppressor; we have to long for our own power to be fully realized- for one's dignity cannot be chained.'" Take addiction for example. What obstacles or things stand in your way of experiencing the full life God wants for you- the abundant life that Jesus promises each of us? God can make a way where there does not appear to be a way forward. God is a Waymaker, and there is a cost to freedom. True freedom is letting go of the fear and having the courage to face the unknown, trusting that God is in charge and in the possibility of a better future despite all the evidence. Often, when we are terrified or too paralyzed to act, we are called to courage and patience. Did you know that courage is just fear that has said its prayers? And courage is not an easy thing to come by when anxiety stirs us to fight, flee, or freeze. That is where faith or belief become another choice and gift. "You can't talk someone into liberation. Telling someone to just get free is like telling someone to stop grinding their teeth. Freedom requires patience with ourselves, as it takes time to feel at peace if all you've ever known is insecurity. It's the process of your soul learning to trust again- trust that it can rest and love and be still without being destroyed" (Riley).

Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians you see today you shall never see again. The Lord will fight

for you, and you only have to keep still” (vv. 13-14). To be fair, at this point in the story, Moses had no idea how God would help them in this situation. He just trusted that God would deliver them somehow, somehow. Yet, “the do not fear is thrown in the face of much to fear, for Pharaoh was determined to prevail over the escapees” (Walter Brueggemann, *Delivered Out of Empire*). “Fear not...because...the Lord is a classic formula that is most familiar to the Israelites. Notice then what God says. God “reversed the seemingly wise guidance of Moses to be still when he said, ‘Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to get moving!’ (v. 15)” (workingpreacher.org, Cory Driver). And then God gives Moses specific instructions to part the Red Sea! Move forward! God did not want the people to stand still and watch, as Moses had said. God wanted the people to move forward into an uncertain future and to trust God in the midst. Maybe this is an invitation from Moses to “receive God’s grace, as salvation or deliverance is solely God’s work and God’s gift. There is nothing that one can do for oneself or needs to do for oneself. It is all divine grace?” (Brueggemann). “Imagine how confused the people would have felt. They were free and rich, only to be threatened again by the same violent system that they thought they had left behind forever. Their leader told them to stand still and watch how God would free them again. Moments later, however, they were told to march toward an unseparated sea. The people must have been crushed with despair” (Driver).

I heard a podcast with Kate Bowler this week where someone was in the depths of two bad choices, and someone else invited them to “move

forward; get moving.” She said, “You can’t just tell me to live without giving me something to live for.” I believe God puts a choice before the Israelites and Moses: trust me or don’t. This choice is ALWAYS easier said than done. Sometimes God’s amazing grace leaves us no choice but to depend on God and to trust that God is with us, especially in our fear. To trust that God makes a way out of no way. With God there is always life, presence, and something to live for. “Just as God delivered the Israelites at the sea, God delivers the world from the powers of sin and death at the cross” (Howard).

This week I experienced my first and I hope my last emergency landing on a plane. It was really scary. The hydraulic system on half of the plane failed, and we had to divert to another airport with a longer run way so as not to go in the water. Silence fell on the plane after the captain spoke plainly and calmly regarding the dire situation. He explained that a hydraulic system is used to help control and manage equipment such as brakes, flaps, thrust reversers, flight controls, and of course, landing gear. If we made it to Baltimore, he told us, we would be greeted by many fire trucks and EMS. His last words were “please make sure your seatbelts are fastened and pulled as tightly as you can stand them.” And then it felt like eternity as 20-30 minutes went by with no one talking, not even children. We were all waiting- many of us wondering if we were going to crash. Was this it?! Panic set in, as did anxiety. People immediately got on their phones to text their loved ones, including me, and some of us prayed and prayed. Talk about feeling helpless and powerless? We landed safely- thanks be to God! With lots of emergency

personnel greeting us to then tell the pilot to quickly cut the plane's engine, as flammable liquid was leaking on to the tarmac. We were "tugged" to our gate. We were then instructed to wait for another plane to take us to our original destination. Of the 153 on the flight, 40 or more decided to not get back on another plane. I knew that I had to eventually come home later this week on a plane, so I decided to get back on another plane after such a terrifying "life flashes before your eyes" experience. Fear is real, y'all, as is God's faithfulness and power to deliver us. I have never been happier to be back on the ground and in one piece!

When we can't see a way out of a situation and we feel completely helpless and hopeless...when we're scared to follow and our hearts are breaking...God parts the way. God, the Waymaker, is faithful and delivers us from sin and death, including structural sin, like Egyptian slavery. And sometimes the path is confusing and our act of faithfulness is to stop standing still and crying out and to move forward into what the Lord is doing (Driver)! For God will bring us out! Freedom is coming! Thanks be to God! Amen.