

Pastor Joe Polzin
Exodus 14:13-31; Mark 1:9-13
“Out of Egypt: Through the Water”
Year B – Lent Midweek 3
March 7, 2018

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Slavery—servitude—eventual death. Brutal taskmasters—heavy burdens—daily despair and hopelessness. This is what it was like for the Israelites to live in Egypt. But it hadn't always been this way. Four hundred years earlier, the land of Egypt was a place of refuge, a place of rescue. It was a place that promised Jacob's family food in the midst of famine. A land where Joseph, Jacob's son, had risen in the ranks to become Pharaoh's second-in-command. It was a place that gave the Hebrews a home at a time when things were becoming desperate.

But that had all changed. A pharaoh had ascended to the throne who did not know Joseph, who did not acknowledge the great deeds and works that he had accomplished for the Egyptians. For Pharaoh, the Hebrew people had become a threat. So, he devised a plan to oppress them. They were a source of free labor he could exploit. The Hebrew people were enslaved to carry out the building projects of the pharaoh. And they groaned and cried out to God in this reality of slavery.

Even though the Israelites had journeyed willingly to the land of Egypt, and even though they had been blessed in this journey by plentiful grain and the beautiful land of Goshen as their dwelling place, what had once been a good and gracious land had now become a place of enslavement. What had once been a place a refuge had now become a place of pain and sorrow. What had once been a place of life had now become a place of death—a land of exile. And the Hebrews were helpless to break free, helpless to escape.

The people were in need of help. They were in need of a savior. They were in need of a leader, a deliverer to rise up from their midst. One who would remind them of who they were and, most importantly, who their God was. One who would gather them together. They needed one who would bring them out of this terrible land of slavery and death. They needed someone who could and who would stand up to Pharaoh. So God sent Moses.

We could spend time talking about Moses and his abilities, or lack thereof. We could speak of his training, his education, or his reluctance. We could speak of his temper, of his lack of faith, of his lack of desire to carry out the task God gave him. We could speak at great length about all of these things; but the only thing that truly matters is that, despite all of that, God equipped Moses for the task God prepared for him, and then sent him to rescue His people. Nothing would stop God from having His way with Moses, with the Israelites, and with Pharaoh.

One hard-hearted pharaoh and ten plagues later, Moses and the Israelites finally were free to leave. They were finally free to return from their exile to the land of their fathers. God's salvation was clearly evident. And Moses and the Israelites were headed back to the land that God promised to their ancestor, Abraham more than four hundred years earlier.

However, on their way out of Egypt, two obstacles remained between them and their salvation. Two obstacles stood in the way of their return from exile. On one hand, a large army, Pharaoh's army, was massing behind them, and on the other hand, a big body of water, the Red Sea, was in front of them. And the Israelites were stuck in the middle. They were stuck between the proverbial “rock and a hard place;” but none of this surprised God. In fact, it's clear, God had

a plan, a way, a means by which to save His people. He would lead them through the water to their salvation.

The Lord God told Moses to raise his staff over the waters of the Red Sea; and miraculously, the waters part in two, and the people passed through the waters on dry ground. As the people went through the waters, they were rescued from the land of slavery and death. The people crossed over from death to life as they began their journey, began their return from exile.

In the words of Moses, God said to His people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.” And so the Hebrew people were saved by the waters. They were saved by God.

And that wasn’t all. In order to deliver a message that would be known among all the surrounding nations (Josh. 2:10), this event would precede the Israelites wherever they went, the waters collapsed on the advancing Egyptian army. Pharaoh and his army were destroyed in the waters. The evil was washed away. There is life in the waters, but there is also death. The same waters that save the people of God, destroy evil Pharaoh and his army. The Israelites walk away alive on dry ground, but the Egyptians are weighed down and drown. The water that preserves life also kills.

This is not the first time in Scripture that water kills and yet also preserves life. In Genesis, God in His strict judgment condemned the unbelieving world through the flood, yet according to His great mercy preserved Noah and his family. This will also not be the last time water functions this way, as it not only foreshadows a second water crossing the Israelites make, the next time through the Jordan River, from the wilderness in which they were wandering, into the Promised Land, but it also foreshadows our own salvation through Christ, and our connection to Him through Baptism.

You see, we too are in a land of slavery and servitude and eventual death. We are slaves to sin, slaves of Satan, and enemies of God. The enemies—sin, death, and Satan—still seek to oppress God’s people. And these enemies are successful, too, for we groan and cry out to God under the burden of suffering in this lifetime, and under the burden of everlasting death. And we are helpless to break free, helpless to escape.

We are in need of help. We need a Savior. We need a Leader, a Deliverer to rise up from our midst. One who would remind us of who we are and, most importantly, who our God is. One who will gather us up and bring us out of this land of exile. We need One who will stand up to Satan and his evil power. And that’s what God did when He sent Jesus.

We could spend some time speaking about Jesus and His abilities. We could speak of His power, of His lineage, of His sacrifice, of His love and mercy. But suffice it to say that in Jesus, God became flesh to dwell among us and rescue us from our land of exile. Jesus went down into the waters of the Jordan to be baptized by John—not to be washed clean of sin, for He had none. No, Jesus went down into the waters of the Jordan to take all of the world’s sins upon Himself, and then immediately went into the wilderness to take them back to the father of sin, Satan, whom Jesus resisted and defeated.

The obstacle to *our* return from exile isn’t an army or a body of water. No, the obstacle is a dividing wall of hostility that was raised between us and God by sin, by our death, and by Satan. But Christ went down into the waters and gathered all sin to Himself in order to prepare the way for our own journey through the waters. The waters of Baptism. And in Baptism, all obstacles to God are fully removed by Him.

Down into the waters of Baptism we went, and those waters killed us. Our old Adam was drowned, and all our sin was washed away. And then up from the waters we rose to new life, a new Adam, a new creation, a new child of God. We came up from those sacramental waters and into the promise of everlasting life, which is ours right now.

Baptism is also our promise that, just as Christ was raised from the dead, we know we will be raised from the dead, as well. When Christ comes again, we will enter the Promised Land of the new heavens and the earth, and our time wandering in the wilderness of this lifetime will be over. Jesus will lead us in our crossing over from death to life. And because of Jesus, we are returned from exile, returned from the land of the slavery of sin. We have journeyed through the waters, forgiven, and into the kingdom of God forever. In Jesus' name. Amen.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

(This sermon is adapted from CPH materials for the series, *Return to Exile: A Lenten Journey* 2017.)