

Exodus 14:19-31
“Getting Across”

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The Paraphrase Version of the Scripture Reading: Exodus 14:19-31

Introductory Piece: Children, please gather ‘round for the Bible story. This fall, we are listening to the stories from the book of Exodus about how God freed the Hebrew people from slavery. Today the story tells us about the people of God crossing the Red Sea with the Egyptian army in hot pursuit.

The Story:

Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, finally let the people go. They fled Egypt that Passover night on foot, moving as fast as they could. God led them forward by a tall cloud during the day and a tall pillar of fire at night. They camped along the way and eventually came to a big expanse of water.

Meanwhile, Pharaoh regretted letting the Hebrews leave and changed his mind. He called together all the military force he could muster and set out to recapture the people. Because they were traveling on horse and in chariots, they were moving faster and got really close to the Hebrews.

When the people saw their enemies coming, they cried out in fear, pleading to God for help. The angel of God and the cloud moved from the front to behind the people, between them and the Egyptians, protecting them. Even with this help, the people felt trapped. In order to go forward, they had to somehow cross the water.

They were so afraid and blamed Moses for putting them into this predicament, but Moses consulted with God, who ordered them to go forward. Moses assured the people that God would fight for them. When he was on the shore, Moses lifted up his staff and a strong wind from the East blew over the water all night long. This created a pathway on dry land, while the water stood on either side of the path like a wall. All the people walked across to safety.

The angel and the cloud went to the front again, encouraging them forward. The Egyptians started down the same pathway, but it was getting wetter and muddy, and the sand clogged up their wheels and made it tough for their horses to move. Once the people of God were on the other side, the Red Sea waters returned to their original place, overwhelming the Egyptians, who did not survive.

God saved the Israelites that day and they believed in the Lord and in his servant, Moses.

Like the Israelites, we come to the edge of ‘Red Seas’ in *our* journeys to God’s future. When we are afraid to go forward, as we talked about with the kids, and when we come up against barriers that stop us in our tracks, it’s like today’s bible story.

It might be the situation of trying to get away from an abusive relationship, or changing your own bad habits. In the workplace, you might face gender or racial discrimination. A surprise health concern or a virus can get in your way, too. As I preach, feel free to type into the chat other examples that impact you.

It’s understandable if we become afraid and confused in such circumstances. I remember a preacher describing the situation this way: “the people were between Egypt and Exodus, and they didn’t want either one!” Then, when we are trapped between a rock and a hard place, we look all around for an escape. Under this pressure, the Israelites blamed Moses and complained against God.

I think you’d agree that today there’s a lot standing in the way of God’s will. A constellation of national events and global concerns currently impede our forward progress and are piling up on individuals in their everyday lives, not to mention the challenges of our *own* sins, greed, and stubbornness. We indeed have ‘Red Seas’ to cross!

How *do* we get across? As the camp song goes: “It’s so high you can’t get over it; so low, you can’t go under it; so wide, you can’t get around it, you gotta go in through the door.”

It is possible to get across these ‘Red Seas.’ Openings *do* present themselves in tight spots. For instance, I read about Dr. King’s terror under threats against him and his family in Montgomery. One sleepless night, he realized that his minister daddy and believing mama were 175 miles away in Atlanta, and his own religion was going to have to become real. *He* would have to come to know the One they knew, himself, the One who could “make a way out of no way.”¹

God commanded the Israelites to go forward, and a pathway from the edge of the water emerged. ‘Miracles’ like this *do* happen. For example, I read about Walter Wink’s experience as a non-violence speaker during the era of Apartheid. He was not permitted to enter South Africa – no visa was issued -so he landed in LeSotho instead and spoke to crowds there. The theme song at his workshop was the Easter hymn, “Thine is the Glory, Risen Conquering Son.” Afterwards, the organizers invited him to steal away into South Africa. Wink was sweating bullets. That night, though, as he approached the border, a terrible rainstorm let loose, cutting off the electricity. When he pulled up to the patrol station, Wink heard the officer inside whistling the tune, “Thine is the Glory,” and immediately felt assured. The officer couldn’t easily see his passport in the dark, so asked Walter to read it to him. He didn’t even request his visa and waved him on through. Wink made the crossing, carrying out God’s work.²

It happens. Because God is with us, we get across the ‘Red Seas.’

The Exodus story tells us that God was there in the angel and there in the voice that Moses heard. God was there in the pillar of fire during the night, and there in the cloud during the day, *in front* as the people traveled. Those symbols of God led them forward. Then, in verse 19, the text tells us that the angel and the cloud very intentionally

¹From Martin Luther King, Jr., “Why Jesus Called A Man A Fool,” sermon delivered at Mount Pisgah Missionary Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois on 27 August 1967, scripture text: Matthew 28:16-20.

²Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Galilee, Doubleday, 1998), 9.

moved from in front to *behind* the marchers, stationing between the Israelites and the ruthless Egyptians all night long while Moses held up his staff all night long and an East wind moved the waters all night long.

The good news insight from this story for me this morning is that God changes position to meet the needs of those crossing.

Ironically, in the world of business these days, one hears a lot about the virtues of “agility” and “pivoting.” Well, *God* is agile, flexible. God pivots, like RCC did going online during the pandemic. God *moves* to protect us and even to push us along through the prepared ‘door.’ We can **count on God** to be present to us in a fashion *customized* to our current situation, **so that like the Israelites we also can get across and go forward!**