

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Rescue at the Sea"

Scripture: Exodus 14:5-7,10-14, 21-29, Matthew 2:13-15

Opening Hymn: How firm a foundation 685

Closing Hymn: Guide me, O thou great Redeemer 651

Children's Hymn: When Israel was in Egypt's land 708

Choruses: Praise the Lord with the Sound of Trumpet 466, Awake, O Israel, Amazing Grace (my chains are gone
September 30

Do you ever wonder why THAT couple got married?

Do you ever wonder why THEY processed to the front of the church
And tied the knot?

There are lots of reasons to commit yourself to another person.
Some are worse and some are better.

Some people marry for sex and some people marry for money.
Some get hitched because they are lonely or they want kids.
Some get engaged because they are getting older
and they feel like they are running out of options

Some make vows because they they've found their best friend.
Some marry because they've encountered
Incredible loyalty and love.

She knew that he was the one, when she broke her wrist that Christmas.
He rode with her in the ambulance.
He sat by her bed in the hospital.
He picked up her meds
and made meals for her at her home.

There are lots of reasons to commit yourself to another person.
Some are worse and some are better.

But if this can be said about marriage
 The same could be said about the life of faith.

Both involve commitments.
 Just think of those vows Mo made
 Here at the front of the church,
 a couple weeks ago:

*Do you renounce the ways of sin
 Which separate you from God?*

*Do you turn to Jesus Christ,
 Accepting him as Lord and Saviour,
 Trusting in his grace and love?*

There are lots of reasons why people decide to follow Jesus.
 Some are worse and some are better.

Some commit to God
 thinking that God will make them rich and successful.
 Some become Christians because they admire Jesus' ethics.

Some profess their faith simply to please their family.
 Some follow Jesus to be like all their friends.

Some profess their faith because they have experienced welcome
 in the Christian community.
 Some turn to God, because God has shown them
 To be faithful and true.

He was living on his own and had only a few dollars till his next paycheck.
His cupboards were bare. He didn't know what to do.
So he prayed. He prayed.

In the mail next morning there was a card from his grandma.
She had included a check.
She thought the money might come in handy.

He suddenly knew that it was more than just grandma
Who was looking out for him.

Just think to yourself quietly:
What are the reasons for your commitment to Christ?

PAUSE

Last week we heard the story of Joseph and Potiphar.
We saw how God's promise to Abraham,
That promise about being a blessing,
Was lived out in Abraham's great-grandson.

Joseph blessed Potiphar's household.
And Joseph ended up blessing Egypt.
[Rather God blessed Egypt through him.]

Joseph told Pharaoh to prepare for a coming famine,
And the people of Egypt escaped mass-starvation.

And so we can see those promises being fulfilled:
Those who blessed Israel were blessed in return.

Today we skip many years ahead.
The people of Israel are still in Egypt
But Joseph and his brothers
have gone on to be with their fathers.

While the people of Israel have prospered in Egypt
a new king came to power
who knew nothing about Joseph's reputation.

This king subjugated Israel.
He enslaved the people.
He enlisted them on his public works projects.

The people may have felt abandoned.
But God didn't forget them.
We are told that God heard their groaning.ⁱ

God calls Moses and sends him to Pharaoh
Telling him, to "let my people go."

What follows is the other half of that promise
That God made to Abraham:
God will bless those who bless Abraham,
But those who curse him will be cursed.ⁱⁱ

While Pharaoh refuses God's demands
God sends plagues on Egypt.
The disasters keep escalating till Pharaoh relents
And lets God's people go.

Which brings us to today's reading.

Today's reading tells us stubborn Pharaoh is having second-thoughts:

“Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds...
and said, “What have we done?
We have let the Israelites go
and have lost their services!””ⁱⁱⁱ

Which leads to today's drama.

Pharaoh sends his best chariots to chase down the escaping people
And bring them back into captivity.

Imagine what the people of Israel must have been thinking
When they heard the sound of hoofbeats,
saw all those chariots bearing down on them,
stared at the water ahead of them,
and realised they were trapped.

The people call out crying and complaining to Moses:

“Weren't the cemeteries large enough in Egypt
so that you had to take us out here in the wilderness to die?”^{iv}

Moses tells the people not to lose their nerve,
To hold on and trust:

“Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance
the Lord will bring you today.

The Egyptians you see today you will never see again.
The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.”^v

And we watch how the pillar of cloud
That had been leading the people by day,
Moves behind them,
A hedge between them at the pursuing army.

Meanwhile the sea that the people were now pinned against
is driven back by a wind that the Lord had sent
So that the waters became dry land.

The people walk between those parted waters,
But when the Egyptians follow after them
The Lord throws them into confusion,
Jamming up their chariots in the mud.

As the Israel makes it to safety
the waters sweep back over the Egyptians.
We are told that “Not one of them had survived.”^{vi}

It is interesting to note that before the crossing of the sea
Both Israel and the Egyptians are unclear about God’s commitment.
Despite losing their firstborn the Egyptians chase after Israel.
Israel, for her part wishes she was back in Egypt.

But when the Egyptian chariots get stuck
Their drivers realise the Lord is fighting for Israel.

And after the same chariots are swallowed by the sea
We are told that:
“the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him...”^{vii}

For the people of Israel both then and now
the story of the exodus in the central story of their faith.

When the Ten Commandments are later given,
those laws includes this preface:

“I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out of Egypt,
out of the land of slavery.”

“I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out of Egypt,
out of the land of slavery.”

“You shall have no other gods before me.””viii

A famous midrash asks the question:

“If the Ten Commandments were so important
why were they not said at the beginning of the Torah?

[To answer this] the Rabbis told a parable...

To a king who entered a new territory and said to its citizens:

“May I be your king?” the people replied:

“What have you done for us
that we should grant you the right to rule over us?”

What did the king do?

He built a wall around the city for them,
he brought the water supply within the city
and fought their battles.

Then when he came before them again and said, “May I be your king?”
they responded, “Yes, Yes.”

And so God did for Israel.”^{ix}

The people of Israel respond to God
Because in the exodus God demonstrates God’s commitment.
God has fought for them, God rescued them
even while they waited.^x

I mentioned that there are better and worse reasons
For committing ourselves to God.

For the people of Israel their commitment
Came as a response to God’s deliverance.

In an act of power, reminiscent of creation,
God leads a people who are broken and afflicted
into a new future.

They are carried from death to life.

This same God will go to incredible extremes
to keep all of God’s promises.

As the story continues we will discover more about this same God
 “who attends to the broken and afflicted
 in ways beyond our imaginings.”^{xi}

Of course the God who makes a path through the sea
 The God who raise the dead to life
 Also demonstrates his love in less spectacular ways,
 More mundane ways.

So what are the reasons for your own commitment?

And if you haven’t made any commitment,
 Might you have good reasons to do so?
 To walk up to the front and to profess your faith?

Let me share a story about one person’s commitment to Christ.
 This is the story of a writer named Lily Burana,
 Told her own words:

*I have always been a person of gloom.
 Even as a small child, I suffered bouts of depression
 salted with anxiety
 before I even knew what the words meant.*

*From toddlerhood on, insomnia overtook me
 as I tried rocking myself to sleep.*

*I didn’t want to get up in the morning.
 I wouldn’t brush my hair.
 I didn’t want to go to school.*

But I did go to church. Until I didn't.

*I'm a cradle Christian, raised on Sunday school classes
with picture books of Moses bobbing in the basket in the reeds
and Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus in the straw-dusted manger...*

*I attended Bible study after school,
and in the summer our teacher toted us to rallies
where I'd win scoops of candy
for correctly reciting Scripture verses...*

*Meanwhile, the darkness within kept creeping...
I became less interested in church,
and by adolescence, depression, sarcasm, and cynicism
had become my holy trinity...*

*At 17, I dropped out of high school
and moved to New York City's East Village...*

*While my outsider status provided an important measure
of belonging and consolation,
it wasn't a lasting answer
to the problem of living with steady depression.*

*I moved to the West Coast and back again,
married, and started working as a writer
between dark spells that froze me
into writer's block for weeks at a time.*

At times, you could say I was passing for normal.

*But a few years ago,
when a dangerously deep and rocky depressive spell
had me in its grips,
I teetered on the brink of suicide.*

*Even with the cosmetic appointments of a full and happy life
—husband, family, health, career—
I felt desperate, alone, scarred, stained, and worthless.*

*At my lowest low, I asked God for a sign that my life meant something,
that I meant something, and God delivered, [God delivered!]*

*in the form of a bald eagle soaring across my sightline
mere minutes after I'd requested that exact omen.*

*I cautiously returned to church, keeping my expectations low.
Would it be anything like I remembered...
Would it be a waste of time?*

*What it turned out to be was fabric softener for my soul—
something rough and stubborn inside me was gentled.*

*Biblical teachings, delivered with theatricality and interpretive depth,
helped me examine my depression
with deliberate care and no judgment.
I loved hearing about how God not only redeems us
but emboldens us:*

*Think of Hebrews 13:6, which quotes from Psalm 118
(“So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?’ ”)...*

*I would love to tell you that God reached down
and whisked away my depression.
Wouldn't that be swell?*

But faith has only made living with it more manageable...

*Through faith in Christ, I feel less alone,
less ashamed, and less likely to conceal my suffering.
Because I know it is heard and believed by God.*

*Laying down your burden is as central to Christian faith
as charity or testimony.*

*When you've been standing on your own for so long,
falling into the arms of mercy is frightening at first,
but then comes a whoosh of blessed relief defying explanation...*

*[Lily concludes:] Doubts about the existence of God closely
resemble doubts about the existence of depression:
Both are rooted in the conviction
that things must be seen to be believed.*

*Yet as the beloved writer Madeleine L'Engle once remarked,
"Some things have to be believed to be seen."*

*My eyes are open, in that "was blind but now I see" kind of way,
and I'm beholding things with a peace and depth
I've never experienced before...^{xii}*

Lily found good reasons for faith.
 So did the people of Israel.
 How about you?

Amen.

ⁱ Exodus 2:23-24

ⁱⁱ See Exodus 12:3

ⁱⁱⁱ Exodus 14:5 NIV

^{iv} Exodus 14:11-12 MSG

^v Exodus 14:13-14 NIV

^{vi} Exodus 14:28 NIV

^{vii} Exodus 14:31 NIV

^{viii} Exodus 20:2,3 NIV

^{ix} Gary A. Anderson "Exodus 14:19-31" *The Lectionary Commentary: The Old Testament and Acts* 90

^x See Exodus 14:14

^{xi} Kathleen M. O'Connor "Exegetical Perspective, Exodus 14:19-31" *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 4: Season After Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ)*

^{xii} Lily Burana "A Punk Rock Rebel Returns to Church" *Christianity Today* October 17, 2017