

Out of Egypt and Into Freedom

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost (RCL, Year A, Track 1)

Sunday, September 20th, 2026

The Reverend Mitchell W. Felton

Preached with the community of Gloria Dei Episcopal Church, Philadelphia, PA

I have been ordained to Holy Orders in The Episcopal Church for 1,016 days. I have been a Confirmed Episcopalian for 2,639 days. And I have been a baptized Christian for 8,301 days. However, I have been Black all my life.

And in the spirit of Black preaching, every now and then, this young preacher is going to need to some help. Which is another way of saying sermons are communal conversations. We preach sermons not individually, but together.

And because sermons are preached together, from time to time, I need an “Amen.”

The Israelites are out of Egypt. The Israelites are out of Egypt because God saw the misery of His people, and heard the cry of His people and He knew their suffering.¹ The Israelites are out of Egypt because Moses, at the shore of the Red Sea, told his flock, “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.”² The Israelites are out of Egypt and out of slavery and bondage because God keeps God’s promises.

And now, today, we hear from the Israelites, “It’s not enough.” The Israelites have been delivered, and it’s not enough. Pharaoh’s knee is off the neck of the Israelites, and it’s not enough. God has been *so good, so faithful*, and has kept His word, and it’s not enough.

And here’s the silly moment of the story: When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was.³

¹ Exodus 3:7

² Exodus 14:13-14

³ Exodus 16:14-15

How is it that the very bread they longed for showed up, and they couldn't even recognize it? Truth be told, there have been countless amounts of times I have not recognized the miracle God gave me.

There is good news and bad news this Sunday.

The good news: God is still in the business of setting folks free. The sins that shackle us, and the systems that have a stronghold on us, don't win. God is breaking and bending this blood-soaked Earth towards justice a restoration.

The bad news: We can get out of Egypt and still walk like slaves.

Or, from our Gospel, we can receive our daily wage, and still be mad that someone else had their needs are met. Or, from my own life, I can blame God for me falling back into the same sin I confessed about.

Gloria Dei, you know your history. You don't need this young priest to tell you who you are. You have been in and out of the wilderness more times than I've taken a breath.

And yet, because God is *too good* and *too faithful*, there's more good news!

Did you see where the glory of the Lord appeared? "And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud."⁴

I believe, in my heart of hearts, God had them look at the wilderness for a reason. Because the glory of God outshines any and every darkness we traverse through.

"Ye though I walk the valley of the shadow of death..."⁵

Think about that for a moment. We have the ability to look at the wilderness of lives, that place of shame and pain, and see the light shining in the darkness, knowing the darkness does not overcome it. Not because of what we've done, who we are, where we've come from, and where we are going. But because the glory of God shines in any and every valley, because God is working all thing out for our good.

What a humiliating grace!

⁴ Exodus 16:10

⁵ Psalm 23:4

Don't let injuries re-shackle you to sin that isn't yours to carry. Don't give into the jealousy, the drama, and the pettiness. Subject all things under your Christ, receive your daily bread, forgive as you have been forgiven, and learn to walk in freedom.