

Sunday September 11, 2022
Lesson 2: Freedom Song
Scripture: Exodus 15: 1-18

Context:

This fall we continue our series titled “Freedom.” Our first unit is titled “Rescue” as we look at how God came to save and lead the Israelites to the Promised Land. Today we connect the Exodus story to our own and encourage engagement with faith stories centered on God’s salvation.

The Book of Exodus in the Old Testament refers firstly to the exodus, or departing, of the Israelites from the land of Egypt and secondly chronicles their entrance into the Promised Land, the land of Canaan. Today’s section of the Book of Exodus contains two hymnic pieces to praise God. These pieces, the Song of Moses and the Song of Miriam, are known as some of the oldest poetry in the Hebrew Bible.¹ These songs present a new experience of God the people are processing together as they experience God as a liberator of oppression and receive a newfound freedom.

In the preceding chapter, the Israelites have been chased by the Egyptians and stand at the Red Sea, believing they will soon be back in slavery. They cry out in pain and God gives Moses instructions to lift his staff and the Red Sea parts to allow the people to pass through. The Egyptians then are swept away in the waters as the Israelites watch on.

The response are these hymns which praise God for what God is doing in their midst and what God has done before. We begin to see the power of adoration and praise. Praise enhances the attractiveness of God and acts as a witness to the world.² For this episode, the praise includes a recounting of what God has done in the past. There is a mythic pattern of chaos where the powers of the world (Egypt) have attempted to take control. Yet it is God the Creator who heaps up the waters and covers the Egyptians with floods, whose winds blow and whose earth swallows them up and creates a people.³ God’s activity in creation overturns chaos and establishes God as more powerful than the powers of the day.

The hymn also makes a point to those around Egypt. Towards the close of the scripture passage, peoples around the world have and will continue to hear about the God of the Israelites. The reputation of Israel’s God goes out ahead of Israel and the Philistines, the Moabites, the Edomites, and the Canaanites will be faced with contending with this God who has already swept aside the Egyptians when it comes to affairs with God’s people. There is an element of warning for those who would dare to thwart the story of God as they would become part of those whom God will sweep aside.

¹ Terence E. Fretheim, “Exodus,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2010), 161.

² *Ibid.*, 164.

³ *Ibid.*, 167.

Application

Faith stories are meant to inspire us. One of the terms we hear often in the South, particularly if we have close ties to a Baptist presence, is the word, testimony. To tell one's testimony is to tell of how one has felt and experienced God's redeeming grace in one's life. The result is a closer sense of belonging to God and seeing the transforming power of the Spirit in one's life. To tell one's testimony is to explain and proclaim how God has "saved" and led one to a new way of life through Jesus Christ as one's Savior and Lord.

Often people who grow up in the church struggle with how to talk about testimony though. For some, there was no huge conversion or a turn from the dark side of the sins which plagued someone. Instead, it was an ongoing nudge and various moments where one felt God at work in their life.

I too find myself in the latter as I have always discovered God is at work on me and works through various ways to remind me of the salvation offered in Christ our Lord. It is an ongoing journey in which God continues to surprise and challenge me, much like our Israelites discover on their journey with God. God continually reaches out to me and others, reminding us of how God continues to save our souls and draw us closer to God. Sometimes, it looks like others and other times, God throws a little path down for us to go on our own and make discoveries we might never have expected.

I hope all Christians have a faith story they can articulate where they can name how God has acted to lead one to assurance in the salvation offered by our Lord. The beauty we discover, like the Israelites, is we are the ones who can name what happened and then share it with others in various ways. Sometimes it comes in the form of sharing with a group of believers in corporate worship. Other times, it comes through a small group or a random conversation in the grocery store. And for the more poetic or creative among us, we can use art as a medium to tell the good news of what God has done for and through us.

One of the things I remind my confirmands when we go through confirmation is they will have the opportunity before being confirmed to come before the confirmation/youth coordinator and me to be interviewed about their faith. For the class I led this past year, I initially noticed the nervousness when this was said at the introductory meeting. The eyes got big, and they gripped their seats, trying to imagine what would be said and how they would be quizzed.

Then it hit me as I sat through trying to think of a way in which I could make this important and monumental event more approachable to a younger generation. I offered as a result for the confirmation interview to go one of three ways: one was a formal interview, the other an opportunity to make a set of tik-tok videos, and the final being a poster. During their interview, they would explain why they chose the medium and how they felt God working to help them tell their story.

When the day of interviews came, I was amazed. The posters all told their unique stories of what they had learned and how they felt Jesus Christ nudging at their heart to grow deeper in the faith. I had them explain the posters to me and then asked them the historic questions about following Jesus all the days of their lives and vowing to serve the Lord and the United Methodist Church with their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their witness, and their

service. The interviews were some of the highest and most holy moments of my ministry as I gave thanks to God for how these young people described how the Lord at work in them and how they could tell of the saving grace which comes through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hopefully all of us can tell our faith story and speak of the salvific acts by which God has interceded in our midst. If you struggle, look to this piece of scripture from Exodus and look at how God is praised, how the writer names how God has done specific things, and then how they recall how others also see what God has done. Write or think about the praise you give God, name the times where you have felt God most present, and then look to the stories of the past and the present for where God's goodness has been noted. See how God does indeed have a part in your story and how God continues to help write the next chapter.

What is your faith story? When are the times you have felt God at work in your life? How might you share your faith story with others? Are there creative ways you might piece together of how God has been at work in your life? Whose faith stories have given you hope and inspiration for your own?

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