

Written Copy: The Mighty Salvation Acts of God-Exodus 14:10-14
Easter Sunday (Easter Dawn Readings)
Sunday, April 11th, 2020

Text: Exodus 14:10-14, 30-31

¹⁰ When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ They said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." ¹³ And Moses said to the 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. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."

³⁰ Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

Exegetical Statement

The LORD has just provided a mighty act of salvation through the plagues He brought against Egypt and their Pharaoh, culminating in the death of all the Egyptian firstborn and the salvation of all the Israel firstborn through the posted blood of the lamb. Following this Israel was allowed to leave Egypt as conquerors with plunder. But the LORD was not done yet. He wanted to show His people just how mighty a God He is when it comes to their salvation. So, He motivated Pharaoh to chase after the Israelites with the false hope he would capture and return them back to be his slaves, or worse. But instead Pharaoh and the Israelites were given witness to just how mighty the LORD's hand works when it comes to saving His people and destroying their enemies forever. Just when Israel believed they were trapped and beyond hope, the LORD, working through His mediator Moses, opened a way in the Red Sea for all of Israel to escape through, while He blocked the way of the Egyptians so they could not attack. Then with Israel safely across Egypt tried to follow. But the LORD, once again working through Moses, sent the waters crashing back into place, killing the Egyptian army that had become immobilized in the middle of the sea. Israel, safely from the other side saw their enemies for the last time dead, washed up on the shore, never again to chase after them. They were overcome with reverent fear and faith in the LORD as the mighty God who keeps His promises to save and to redeem all those whom He calls His people. He did it all for them, without them having to lift a finger.

Focus Statement:

Just as in the Red Sea account God the Father worked through the will and plans of sinful men so that His Son, innocent of any charges suffered and was put to death. But the resurrection shows that rather than optimate defeat the Gospel is the story of ultimate victory that the forces of evil could not stop but actually worked to fulfill His plan

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

In the wake of COVID-19 and the changes it has wrought in our lives we can lose sight of the might salvation work the LORD has done for us. We bemoan the loss of life as it used to be instead of looking forward by faith in our mighty God.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Know that the LORD still works out His plan through us His Church and through even the opposition of the enemies of the Church. While our world may not return to exactly what it was pre COVID-19 we will gather to praise His name and mighty acts of salvation, and be witnesses of His mighty works to the world.

Subject Sentence: Saving His Church for Eternal Life-not temporal

Introduction: Different Easter-Different Sermon Text

It's just not the same this Easter, is it? We can't have family and friends over for Easter Dinner. We can't dress in our finest and come to Church, rejoicing as the gathered assembly to celebrate the Church Festival upon which every other Sunday is patterned, the Resurrection celebration that is Easter. It's not the same for me, not seeing the pews filled with my brothers and sisters in Christ, not having your presence lifting me up as you sing and respond together, voices joined in the liturgical celebration: "**Alleluia, Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!**" It's not the same as we have to miss out on the fellowship of Easter Breakfast beforehand, and the after-worship Fellowship Hour that makes us a unique congregation. It's not the same that this Sunday lacks the opportunity of other Easter Sundays to invite and see families and individual who don't normally come through our doors, when we have the opportunity to welcome them in Christian greeting, friendship, fellowship and love, things that are lacking in the world outside the Church. It's not the same that we have to forgo our celebration of the Lord's Supper.

So perhaps since this Easter celebration is so different from those in the past, and I pray from those yet to come in the future, it's a good opportunity to do something a little different with the Easter Sermon. Instead of basing it on one of the resurrection accounts, or the Epistle Lesson (although Paul's reminder of what the Gospel is will have its appearance), I've been drawn to the Old Testament Lesson., to the account of God's mighty saving act for Israel at the Red Sea. And through that, to focus with a fresh look on His even mightier act of salvation that is Jesus' death and resurrection.

God's Mighty OT Saving Act

That Old Testament Lesson begins with Israel encamped at the Red Sea. The LORD, through His mighty act of salvation that was the 10 plagues, had already accomplished their release from slavery in Egypt. He did this to prove to Egypt that their gods were not real, to prove to that the LORD God alone brings calamity and relief. The final plague proved that the LORD alone has the power to bring death as well as save from death. By His authority He designated means by which Israel's first born were to be saved from death as the blood of the sacrificial lamb spread on their doorposts. This Israel' children were saved while death was poured out on all the firstborn children in Egypt. Just as God had intended, Pharaoh and his officials commanded that Israel leave their land and do so immediately. These people whose departure requests were denied repeatedly, were given gifts from their former masters that made their departure seem more like that of conquerors than former slaves.

The LORD led them out of Egypt and to the edge of the wilderness that lay between Egypt and their destination of the Promised Land. Then He halted the march. He made them turn back and head in the wrong direction, leading them to the shore of the Red Sea, which effectively block their path of escape. The LORD did this on purpose. He wanted it to appear

to Pharaoh and his officials that Israel was lost and confused in the wilderness. That they would be ripe for the picking, easy targets if he wanted to chase after them. The LORD showed His sovereign ability over the will of those who do not believe in Him and refuse to serve Him. He hardened Pharaoh's resolve that Egypt needed these slaves back, and that he was powerful enough bring them back, despite what their God had just done to the firstborn of his country.

And so, Pharaoh set out with his elite force of chariots and soldiers, the trained army of the nation that was the superpower of that time and place. And they were going after a people who, while numerically superior, were not an army, but former slaves who did not know how to fight, nor did they have the weapons to do so. They would be no match for Pharaoh's trained army. And when Egypt showed up on the scene and camped right beside them Israel freaked out. Egypt had effectively blocked their escape and boxed them in, with the impassible sea on their other side. Israel responded by crying out to God in fear. Not crying out in faith, but in faithless despair. They turned to His mediator/leader Moses, and accused him of purposefully bringing them out of Egypt only to be slaughtered. In their fear they totally forget the mighty act of salvation the LORD had just accomplished for them that enabled them to leave Egypt in the first place. They see this as a huge mistake. They see this as the end.

But this is not how the LORD saw it. This is all part of His plan to show both Egypt and Israel His power and might. To show them just how strong and mighty He is against those who would harm His chosen people. How mighty and strong He is when it comes to saving His people. The LORD speaks to Moses. **(Exodus 14:13-14)** ¹³ **And Moses said to the 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. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."** And that's exactly what happens.

His real presence among them, manifested as a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night positions itself in between Israel and the army of Egypt. Darkness falls on Egypt, while the night is supernaturally lit up for Israel. Then the LORD commands Moses to stretch out his arm, and the water in the sea that lays before them miraculously parts, making a wall of water on either side, with dry ground opened up for Israel to pass through. How big was this path? Moses account doesn't say. How many Israelites passed through, along with their belongings and their flocks? The Bible doesn't give us a number. But theologians have speculated that as many as a million Israelite men, women, and children walked through the Red Sea on dry ground. And the path created for them to do so in one night could've been a mile to two miles wide, or more. All of that water held back, and dry ground that was passable for them created only by the miraculous working and power of the LORD.

But allowing them to escape from Egypt was only part of the plan. As the LORD promised He would ensure that these enemies would never threaten them again. When all of Israel had safely made it through the Red Sea, the real presence of the LORD in the pillar of cloud/fire moved out of the way so that Egypt might chase after them. Only they would not

be allowed to safely pass through the Red Sea. The LORD caused the wheels of their chariots to be bogged down, and this trained army to be thrown into confusion. Too late they realized that the LORD was still fighting for His chosen people, and that they were no match for Him. But before they could escape, all that water returned to its place, crashing down on them, crushing them, and killing them. **Exodus 14:30-31** ³⁰ **Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.** ³¹ **Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.** The LORD showed them how powerful He is when it comes to saving His people. He proved to them He is the one and only God who can save and redeem His chosen from all their enemies no matter how hard they might try to work against Him.

God's Greater Saving Act in Jesus death and resurrection

As awesome as that story is of God's mighty work of salvation, the Gospel of Jesus salvation for all mankind is even more miraculous and far greater. Just as with Old Testament Israel, when Jesus was arrested, tried, and crucified, His faithful followers gave up hope too. Even though He had told them His suffering and death were all part of the Father's plan that would culminate in His resurrection, they still saw only defeat. The dream they had of a new life with Christ as king was over. They feared that His fate was also awaiting them.

But God changed their perspective, and their life with the resurrection. What appeared to be defeat at the hands of Jesus' enemies was actually the playing out of God's will all along. The Father worked through the plans and scheming of sinful Jews and unwitting Romans alike. Not even Pilate's knowledge of Jesus innocence could stop His going to the cross. And the devil's evil scheming desires to make God in human form suffer and die only played right into the devils ultimate undoing. Jesus resurrection is proof positive of His cry of victory from the cross: "It is finished". And when he rose again on the third day, the first appearance He put in was in hell before the devil and His demons to announce His victory and their eternal defeat.

Christ rose again so that His disciples then as well as we who worship Him today can know and believe in Him as the mighty God who saves and redeems His people, not just from slavery and evil in this world, but freeing them from slavery to sin, death, and the devil for all eternity. Just as Israel saw the defeat and death of its enemies washed up on the shore, in Jesus' death and resurrection we see the defeat of all that would keep us separated from Him. The defeat and removal of all of our sins. And in His resurrection, we see what is truly awaiting us in our future. We too, along with all that have gone on before us will rise from the grave on the Last Day, never to die again.

Our sins weren't strong enough to stop Jesus. The devil, and all his evil scheming to keep us enslaved to him and bound for eternal hell, were not strong enough to stop Jesus. And nothing on this earth today can stop us from proclaiming the message we've been given as the Church to proclaim to the world: **(1 Corinthians 15:3-4)** ³ **For I delivered to you as of**

first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. That is the Gospel Message that was prophesied by the Scriptures beforehand and played out before the eyes of believers and unbelievers alike. The resurrection of Christ was, and is, an unbelievable miracle that has never happened before. It was witnessed by His disciples, Jesus' stepbrother James, and 500 others. Of these 500 some had passed on by the time Paul wrote this letter. But many of them were still alive, and could've contradicted Paul's testimony, except none did. That is because Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is the truth. It's the truth that changes everything. It is the truth of what lies ahead for you and for me.

God Saved us for continued ministry post COVID-19

It's the truth we especially need to hear now, as we deal with the threat that COVID-19 is to our lives as well as to our future ministry as the Church. We all fear our death. But in that fear do we lose sight of what lies on the other side of death? Do we lose sight of and faith in what Christ's resurrection promises? We all desire a return to life the way it was before COVID-19. But we are hearing that even when the "Shelter in Place" order is lifted, a return to what was normal may not be the case. This can cause a fear in us as real as the fear Israel felt at the Red Sea. They desired a salvation from slavery that would lead them directly to the promised land. But the LORD still had some work to do in them. He still has some work in us to do as well. Part of that is to open our eyes to the fact that our lives on this earth are not the end all that we sometimes see them to be.

God's message to Israel at the Red Sea was: No matter what the future holds for you, My people, know that I hold you tightly in my hands. Your salvation and your future is safely in my hands. Hold fast to me and my promises by faith, and watch me display my mighty acts before you. No matter what is in store for you, it cannot annul what your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has done for you, for me, and for all men. No matter what is in store for us, we have not been relieved of our call as His Church to build one another up in the faith so that we can share His resurrection victory with the world. The LORD designed His Church for fellowship, as **Hebrews 10:24-25** make clear ²⁴ **And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.** And so I am at work now through the means of technology to stir you up, believing that this is only temporary and that the LORD intends for us once again to gather together in person and worship as His people. Not even COVID-19 can cancel the promise that He is truly present in His Word and Sacrament, and that they are His gift to provide us freedom from slavery to sin, death, and the devil. That they are His means to keep us free.

Conclusion

Easter is not the same this year. Things may never be the same like they were before the Virus. But our LORD is still the same. His power to save us from sin, death, and the devil is still the same. His promise that just as He arose on Easter morning, all who believe in Him will likewise rise again on the Last Day still stands. That there is one day in the future when whatever state this world finds itself in will be wiped away, that promise still stands. His love for you still stands. The promise that His Church will remain as His witness of the Gospel still stands. Just as He told Israel to stand by faith and observe His mighty saving acts, He says the same to you and to me today. Hear His Gospel Message, His mighty saving act proclaimed. And watch as He opens the way for us to carry on as His Church, gathered in faith, fellowship, and proclamation of His mighty saving acts in the Gospel. Amen.