

## Sermon – Exodus 14:10-31

We've finally reached the big event. The children of Israel finally escape the Egyptians as they cross the Red Sea. They have been through some really fearful times, physically and spiritually, but now the moment has arrived.

I'm sure we all know of some Hollywood or fictional adaptation of Moses crossing the Red Sea. But it's because this story is so familiar to us already, that we must be careful not to read through it quickly, thinking about how we believe it to be true.

Our challenge this morning is to view this story with fresh eyes and to be open to what the Holy Spirit will teach us. Hopefully, things may challenge us, encourage us, or even convict us in our own journey with the Lord.

### RECAP:

If you remember from last week, Israel couldn't go across land toward Canaan. That wasn't what God had instructed them to do. In fact, God made them travel south instead of the far more obvious and safer path to the north, in what looked like a trap.

And we asked ourselves, *why did God do such a thing?* As it turned out, they weren't ready for the fight yet.

And just as Pharaoh saw the Hebrew carts disappearing into the distance, he realised: *What was he doing letting them go?* The Hebrew slaves were the backbone of the Egyptian economy. What would they do without their labour?

And so, as the vastness of that economy started to leave (remember 2 million people), Pharaoh was a little concerned to say the least. Once he realized he'd made a mistake, he gathered together the full force of his army and set out in hot pursuit of the Hebrews.

And the Israelites found themselves with their whole lives strapped to the backs of their animals, with their wives and children marching into the wilderness.

Now I learned something this week. I had always assumed that the location of the Red Sea crossing was well known. But...it seems that no one really knows the route the Israelites took for sure.

Some think they went through the Red Sea down here...some think they went through the more northern tributaries here...

What we do know is that the whole nation of Israel went toward a very large body of water.

Think about that again for a second. In v.10 the Egyptian army was close behind and it was full of fighting men that *would* have lost someone (maybe a family member) in the last of the ten plagues and they would have been angry and vengeful. That would have been absolutely terrifying for the Israelites.

Yet on they marched. With thousands of soldiers behind them and the sea spreading out in deep, dark blue in front of them.

And literally between a rock and a hard place, what was Israel's first reaction?

It was to complain about their condition to Moses and cast the blame for their trouble onto him.

**vv.11-12**

***'They said to Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? <sup>12</sup> Didn't we say to you in Egypt, "Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians"? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!'***

What rings out to me in these verses is that the Israelites cried out to God, but in the next verse we see they are *speaking* to Moses.

First, they cry to the LORD, then they complain to Moses.

**Isn't this incredible? How many of us cry out to God for help but still continue to complain to those around us? How many of us cry out in prayer and then fail to trust in him? And who are those people who we complain to?**

Just this week it has become increasingly clear to me that this is what I have been doing. In what is becoming a season of my life that is becoming harder and harder to navigate, I have been crying out to God for help but what I had forgotten to do is show those around me that my trust *is* in him. I haven't been a very good example on that front at all.

I think it can be summed up best like this:

***We cannot know peace if we don't say what we pray! (repeat)***

We pray one thing to God and then we say to our friends and family, *'I just don't know what I'm going to do.'*

In my opinion that's an example of a faithless prayer if ever I saw one. And we all do it I'm sure. We know that we can take our prayers to God, but sometimes we just don't truly believe he hears them, for whatever reason, but deep down this gives us no peace.

Peace. I don't know about you but sometimes, quite a lot of times I crave peace like nothing else. As I go about my day, I notice the world has a way of robbing us of our peace that often leads to times of extreme anxiety and fear.

I look around and I see so many people are hurting, lonely and worried about what the future might hold, and it grieves me.

Brexit put fear into many people. Who will be allowed to stay in the UK? What about our industry or NHS?

Across the UK knife crime has spiralled out of control and ruined the lives of many.

There are identity issues. Only last week I was speaking to somebody about the identity issues our young people were facing, be it sexual or gender.

Climate change is real, and the effects are becoming more and more destructive.

And today, like the rest of the world we are facing a medical emergency.

Our peace seems to be very fragile doesn't it?

And I think Moses may have felt the same. He was leading the people out into the desert, and he didn't know what was ahead either.

All he knew was that God had led them this far and, as a leader, he didn't have much choice but to stand his ground.

Moses wasn't unfamiliar with the fear they were facing; remember for weeks he'd make excuses about how and why he wouldn't be able to lead the people. Doubts that reappear in vv.15.

#### **vv.15-18**

***'Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. <sup>16</sup> Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. <sup>17</sup> I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen.***

God almost sounds impatient here, doesn't he? as if he's saying:

***'Look, I brought you out of Egypt. Haven't I proven myself over and over again in that process? Now I am asking YOU to show up; to participate in your own redemption; to step out in faith. It's all there, right in front of you. So, get going.'***

And this (for me anyway) is exactly the point. The Exodus wasn't just an escape from Egypt. The Exodus, the crossing of the Red Sea and the journey to come was part of a process which the Israelites had to go through.

It would have been very easy for God to lift the Israelites up and lay them down on the other side of the water. Legend could easily have put it that way, but the Bible does not.

The Bible, like we should, takes things step by step.

#### **vv.19-20**

***'Then the angel of God, who had been travelling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, <sup>20</sup> coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other.'***

Strange verse?? Who is this *'angel of God'* then?

On a number of occasions in the OT we see an angel of God. My own thoughts are this messenger is the Lord Jesus himself, the Eternal Son of God. Why do I think this?

There is a clue in the next verse. In v.21 a strong east wind blew, forcing back the waters of the Red Sea. The word translated wind in Hebrew means Spirit.

And if the Father and the Spirit are there then my guess is the Son will be there too.

**vv.21-22**

***'Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, <sup>22</sup> and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.'***

And finally, here it is! Oh, how it must have been terrifying. They were being asked to step into the unknown, to risk everything dear to them, to follow God not just with their words but with their very lives. And they were scared.

But before their fearful eyes, a path opened up through the middle of the sea. All they had to do was take the first step.

The question was not, *"will God bail us out?"* but *"will we have the courage to step out in faith?"*

And so, they did. The Hebrew people, swallowed their fear, lifted their feet and walked right into the middle of the sea.

With every step it must have taken courage and faith like they'd never had before, one step in front of the other, each step a signal that faith and hope were bigger than the fear that had held them back.

There's no illusion that this kind of faithful living is easy. The story of the Hebrew people illustrates with more drama anything we'd ever want to experience in our own lives. It shows us that a life of faithfully following God can be paralyzingly terrifying.

But in the hardest moments of our lives there are decisions that need to be made, decisions about whether or not we will lift our feet and take the next step, even though we have no idea what's ahead, or we're scared beyond belief or both. But it's all part of the process.

Yesterday I was part of a group who were looking at what being missional could look like in Inverness. We discussed many things like where mission was being done already and what opportunities there are but the overriding sense for me was, we all recognise the church has to do more.

On Friday morning, before I met with Scott and our ministry team, I was in town. I'd just come out of the book shop and as I walked back to the car, I felt I had to stop to

Speak with a man begging on the street. I said something like, 'you look freezing, are you ok?' He answered in very broken English that he was cold and had been there some time.

So, I gave him some money. I had a bag full of outreach NT Bibles with me so I felt I should ask him if he wanted one. 'I'm Catholic' he said. 'Would you like one?' I asked again. He wasn't keen. But then it dawned on me that he probably couldn't read it anyway. Well done Stuart, silly mistake.

We prayed together and as I walked away, I felt angry. This guy was happy to tell a complete stranger that he had a faith in Jesus and all I did was potentially add to his isolation by offering him a Bible he probably couldn't even read.

And I was angry at the fact that this man of faith, probably hadn't received mass in a long time. Why wasn't the church doing something about this travesty? Why was he being denied this basic sacramental right?

And I get scared about this. Because I know that change is going to be tough and we don't have all the answers but to think that we are letting God's people down is deplorable.

But as we prayed, the guy seemed at peace. Even if for only a few moments anyway.

The letter to the Hebrews says (11:1):

***'Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.'***

Clearly this man had faith and perhaps even hope through his faith in God. Even in his misery, he had faith in what he couldn't see.

And if we too are going to trust in God to guide us, then God expects us to believe with our hands and feet.

## **vv.29-31**

***'But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. <sup>30</sup> That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. <sup>31</sup> And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.'***

Terrifying, for sure. But God is there every step of the way protecting us from all sides. It's the all-encompassing presence of God in front, behind, on the sides, surrounding the people with protection and guidance once they had the courage to take that first step.

By the end of this chapter we have seen the Israelites go from nothing but panic, fear and chaos, to praising God for saving his people and putting their trust in Moses. Something he will need as we continue through the book of Exodus.

And so, it is with us. God makes a way; God asks us to act in faith with our feet; and God is always with us.

The story of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea is one that inevitably makes us consider what our own lives are like when we are facing our own Exodus.

But more importantly, are we seeing others travelling their own wilderness journey? Who is it you see that has come to their own Red Sea crossing?

What sometimes gets lost in the *'Hang in there, God knows what he's doing'* stuff is actually, *'What are we doing to reassure those suffering as they deal with their own Exodus.'* We have the supreme example.

**Jesus entered the waters of death and has passed through the other side to new life.** In his death on the cross Jesus passed through an eternity of nothing into an eternity of everlasting beauty and joy.

And if we are in Christ (which means in faith we strive to live like Christ going out and reaching the people where they are) then we passed through it with him.

Paul said (1 Corinthians 10:1-2):

***'Brothers and sisters, I want you to know something about our people who lived long ago. They were all led by the cloud. They all walked through the Red Sea. <sup>2</sup> They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.'***

*'They were all baptized'*, says Paul. They went into the water and then they came out. They passed through the waters of death and came out to freedom. On the one side of the Red Sea they were runaway slaves. On the other side, they were a liberated people.

And this is what happened at the cross and the resurrection.

On Good Friday we were slaves, under the authority of sin and death and facing divine judgement.

On Easter morning we were a liberated people, free from sin, and free from judgement.

Christ passed through the waters of death on our behalf but he also achieved this so we might listen to his commands to love our neighbour, feed the hungry, cloth the poor and heal the sick.

Like the Israelites walking out with their old life behind them, we walk through life with our old selfish and inward-looking ways behind us.

But sometimes this is just too much. Maybe you see sin and deceit on the horizon, just as the Israelites saw the Egyptian army. And you are afraid, like them.

Will you return to the old ways? Will sin overtake you? What will stop you being crushed by it?

In vv.13-14 there are three things that God intends for us to hear today.

## **Do not be afraid**

Sin can pull us down. Down beneath those waters of death, and it feels like sin is overwhelming us. So how do we respond to these fears? Not by pretending that our sin isn't a problem, or that we don't deserve judgement because we do. We all do. But what can we do to shake this fear?

We tell ourselves that we have *already* been pulled down to death, in the person of Jesus. We died with him at Calvary and we have risen with him too.

***The Lord will fight for you'*** says Moses (v.14).

Christ has taken on sin and death; he has faced them head on and he has given us the victory.

## **Stand Firm**

The Israelites faced an army, and so they wanted to surrender and return to slavery. In the same way, we face an army too.

But 'our struggle' says Paul (Ephesians 6:12):

***'is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.'***

And this is a dark world, as I have already said. We face the temptations of the world, the flesh and the evil one every day. We walk by the man begging on the street. We turn our nose up to the drunk. We do nothing when young people have nowhere to go. We are quite happy sitting in the cosy little world we have created for ourselves and we are tempted to go back to slavery.

But with faith in Jesus Christ we stand firm.

Moses' word to us is the same as Paul's (Ephesians 6:13):

***'Therefore, put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.'***

Our armour is the Gospel. It is faith in the finished work of Christ. Satan accuses us of all sorts and lies about our ability to withstand him. He says we cannot resist him and that we are his.

But we say NO! We can and we are not. I am Christ's. I am on the other side of the sea now. I am no longer under the power of sin. I have gone through death and resurrection in Christ. And so, I have risen to new life and I will stand firm, whatever lies the enemy may try and tempt me with.

## **Be Still**

Can you imagine what it's like to stand still as the greatest army in the world bears down on you? Every instinct you have is telling you to either fight or flee.

I wonder If we instinctively want to stand and fight our weaknesses and our problems with our own strength, in our own way? Like when we don't say what we pray.

Or do we naturally tend to flee from our problems and hope that if we ignore our weaknesses they will disappear?

Maybe we're in the midst of conflict and uncertainty right now? Maybe we fear repercussions for something, like judgement or shame? Maybe we feel like the world is falling apart.

God says, 'Be still'.

Now that doesn't mean we can walk away from any and all responsibility and do nothing. It means we take responsibility for what is in our lives and on our hearts, but you leave the rest to God.

I once heard someone say, '*I can do 95% of what I need to, but the last 5% is up to God.*' Our problem is we take responsibility for what isn't ours.

I'm responsible for being a good parent but not for the choices of my children. I must leave that to God and be still.

I'm responsible for telling others the gospel but I'm not responsible for their salvation. I must leave that to God and be still.

And ultimately, although I am responsible for my own sin, I'm not responsible for achieving my forgiveness. I must leave that to God too and be still.

The world is a difficult place to navigate and there is often so much that causes us to stray from the right path that it can be so easy to close our eyes to the real issues. Identity, anxiety, justice, social justice. So, when we are afraid, and we feel the weight of sin and the enemy: we do what is right, take responsibility and do it step by step.

And our strength to just be still comes from nowhere except God.

In Jesus Christ, He came and walked through the waters of sin and death.

In other words (Romans 8:31):

***What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?***

In this knowledge, don't be afraid; stand firm and be still.