

Series: Some Sermons Pastor Mike Wants to Preach Before He Leaves!
Sermon: Time to Get Your Feet Wet!

Exodus 14:10-18 21-22

10 As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. 11 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? 12 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!”

13 Moses answered the people, “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. 14 The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

15 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. 16 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. 17 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. 18 The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.”

21 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, 22 and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

A little boy came back from Sunday school one morning and his father asked him: “Well, what did you learn?”. The little boy replied: “How the people of Israel were kept in Egypt and used as slaves by this guy called Pharaoh.” “Oh?” said the father. “Then what happened?” The little boy went on “A guy named Moses tried all these special effects on them. He turned the river to blood, he covered the Egyptians with frogs, and bugs, and boils. He beat them down with hailstones, and locusts, and scared them with an eclipse of the sun. He started killing their cattle and then finally killing their oldest kids.” “And did it work?” his Dad asked “Well, Pharaoh lets them go after the kids were killed, but then he sent his army after them.” “And then what?” “Well . . . Moses calls in the Israeli air force. And they strafed the Egyptian tanks and destroyed them on the ground. They also gave cover while the engineers lay down this pontoon bridge across the Red Sea. And then the people of Israel crossed over without getting their feet wet. But when the Egyptian army got on the pontoon bridge, the air force came back and bombed it away, and the Egyptians drown.” The father is now confused. “Is that what your teacher told you?” his father asked “Well, not exactly. But if I told it the way she did, you’d wouldn’t believe me!

So what is this story all about? The Hebrew slaves had a proud history. They could go all the way back to Abraham hundreds of years prior, and they knew that there was a promised land out there for them somewhere, sometime. But for now, they were slaves, for again, hundreds of years. But Moses comes, and out they go. Once the Israelites had left and the Egyptians are now slaveless, Pharaoh had second thoughts and came after them with his army and threatened them with extinction. And in our OT reading this morning we find the Israelites in a dilemma because Moses didn’t check the map. This spot at the edge of the Red Sea was the place

of their predicament. It was a dead-end street. To the north Egyptian stone fortresses and beyond these, the Mediterranean Sea. To the south was the Egyptian desert. To the west was Egypt and Pharaoh, and to the east, the foreboding Red Sea. They were boxed in and God was the one who put them in the box! In front of them was the seemingly impassable Red Sea and behind them were the Egyptians. And I love the line that the former slaves give to Moses, for it sounds like the sarcastic line that I would give, "Were there no graves in Egypt that you brought us out here in the desert to die?" That kind of pessimism and cynicism will be a common theme for the next forty years as they wander in the desert on their way to the promised land. But for now, they think they're toast. And the Lord opens up a route for them through the Red Sea, the waters were divided, the waters rolled up on the left and on the right. Notice how the Lord did not say where this path through the sea went. All they could see were the first hundred yards or so. The story tells us that this took place at night. You're walking through the night in the middle of the ocean. The pathway led down below sea level, with a walls of water all around. They did not know where they were going, they were hoping that there was an exit on the other side. All they could do was trust that the one who brought them thus far were going to lead them through.

You can use this story as a personal metaphore for your life. Not sure where you're going, but hoping that God has it somehow figured out. This morning, I want to use the Red Sea narrative as a metaphor for our church this morning. What a proud history we have. 181 years ago, Alvin Waller and his family arrived to the falls to begin his assignment as missionary to the Native Population. The couple had two young kids, and they had travelled from New York around Cape Horn by way of Honolulu, a 22,000 mile journey before he got to the falls up the Willamette. For two years he ministered out of the rough two room dwelling he built for his family at the edge of the falls.

In the winter of 1842, Alvin Waller and Jason Lee persuaded 27 Americans to pledge \$837 to build this first Protestant church building west of the Rockies. In this famous lithograph of Oregon City, you can make out the church building on the right, about ten years old at this time. The building was 40 feet by 26 feet. To give an indication of it's size, a couple of them would fit in our sanctuary. The church bell was donated by George Abernaethy, the first governor. The location is where the mill is today.

In 1848, Gold had been discovered in California. Every man went to check it out, except for five. In 1849, Oregon City was filled with women, children, Native Americans and five white men - two of whom were Methodist pastors! The men eventually returned. In 1850, Oregon City was asked to provide a pastor to go start a church 12 miles downriver in the little town of Portland. We started the Methodist Church in Portland and in many other surrounding communities as well.

Our second location for the first building came in 1857, right before the major flood of 1861. The church was moved up the street, to a higher elevation by a team of oxen up the hill a little ways, now at 7th and Main. That church building lasted for another thirty years. You can see the parsonage on the right. The flood would have wiped away the church at the former location. Second location, first building.

In 1890, the original church building and parsonage were moved to the back of the block, and a new gothic style building replaced them on Main Street. You only kept this style for 13 years. Second location, second building. Powerlines or phone lines just crept into the picture.

In 1903, you decided it was time to remodel. The church was raised up, the steeple was shortened, and a store was built underneath to be leased out as a way of raising funds. The church door is on the arched door on the right. Four days after Armisit Day in 1919, the church and store burned to the ground. What caused the fire was never discovered. Most of our records about our past were destroyed. Although the church had some insurance, most of that money went to cover the loses of neighboring businesses. So the church had to improvise.

We moved up the hill again. This time to 8th and Center. The Eastman-Marey Caufield Mansion was bought. You worshiped in a mansion. This photo is before they paved Singer Street, right before McLaughlin House followed the church up the hill. This building lasted 29 years.

Here's a close up shot of the mansion. You're now at the third location, third building. You still retained some business property downtown, and the rents provided most of the income to your congregation. In each change of location and in each remodel, over our 181 year history, there were controversies and disagreements. Folks would sometimes leave the church over these squabbles of location and church design. I'm glad we're over that now - I'm hoping!

In 1949, the old church was razed and it was replaced by a building that many of you remember. This photo was taken before the parsonage next door was razed for a parking lot. This building lasted longer than all of the others by a long shot, for fifty years. You would have your first Christmas Eve service in that building in 1953. The seasons of Lent and Advent were first observed by Oregon City in the 1960's. This building had seven different levels, only three of which were handicap accessible. And only 16 parking spots.

And it was time to build a facility for the future. And again, we moved up hill again. We are running out of hill to move up to. At this rate, in 500 years, our church will be on top of Mt. Hood! We are now in our fifth building and fourth location, finished in 1998ish. Carrying on the tradition of bringing Christ to the Oregon City community. On average in your history, about every 25-30 years, a new building or a remodel comes along. We're 22 years in here, so we're halfway to something else!

Now, why did I go through all of this history just now? First, because some of us don't know the back story and our tradition. But second, I want to respond to several questions I've received in these last couple of months. On more than one occasion, I'd been asked, "Pastor Mike, do you think our church is going to make it? Do you think we'll be around in 20-30 years?"

Are you going to make it? If the history of this church has shown us anything, it's that we couldn't kill you off if we tried. Of course you're going to be fine. Matter of fact, I think your best years are still ahead of you. Not because of me, but because of who you are. This church always finds a way. And I have been honored to be a part of this congregation for these past 8 years, or only for 4% of your total history! Our continued presence is a testament to our commitment to this sacred space - but more importantly, our commitment to each other. I support this church, not only for what it does for me, but for what it does for our community. For those in our congregation. Because it still provides hope to the hopeless. It still provides light in a darkened world. It still provides love, to some who get no love anywhere else. At meet and greet time, someone once told me that the only hug they ever get happens then. And it reminds her that someone, somewhere still cares. That's why we support this church. Because it makes a difference in people's lives. The children of Israel knew they couldn't go back, all they could do was to take the path that was before them, even when they didn't know where it was going to go. And we, as a church, as well as in our personal lives, we can't go backwards. All we can do is go forward in the path where Jesus leads us, not knowing where it goes, but trusting in the one who leads us forward. I don't know what this church will look like in another generation. Just as previous generations didn't know either. But forward we go to that proverbial promised land. Providing light and salt to our community in the years ahead. And the people of God said, Amen!

Opening: Good morning Oregon City UMC and Online Guests. I'm down here at the Museum of the Oregon Territory. It is a wonderful museum with a informative walk-thru of a lot of Oregon City and Clackamas history. There is a part of our history down here as well. It is the old cornerstone of our first church that was at our first and second location. It escaped the fire of 1919 that took out most of the church and was donated to the museum. It's around 180 years. You'll hear a lot more OCUMC history in our sermon today. A cornerstone is a useful part of a building, especially in ancient times, because it served as a principal stone or marker placed at

a corner of an edifice to guide the workers in their course to complete the project. Everything was aligned to the cornerstone. For us, Jesus is our cornerstone. He is the foundation, the measuring guide, and the promise of God to His creation. He is the light that guides us to a straight path whenever we are in darkness. In the New Testament, we can also read that Jesus was referred to as a cornerstone, specifically in Ephesians 2:19-21, as Paul said,

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

If you need to put your life back into alignment, check yourself with the cornerstone. Jesus Christ. Here are this morning's announcements.

Children's Time: Three thousand years ago, the ancient Hebrews were slaves in Egypt under Pharaoh, the king. But Moses came to free them, with God's help and power - that's a different story for a different day. But there was an escape in our Bibles that still amazes me.

The Israelites were on their way out of the country, Good bye Pharaoh. But Pharaoh had a change of heart and went after them with his chariots and army. By that time, Moses had led the people out into the desert on the way to the promised land, but they were also up against the sea.

And Pharaoh's army shows up. The Bible even tells us where they caught up to them: Picture this: On one side of the Israelites is Pharaoh's army, a group of angry men with chariots, horses, and weapons. On the other side is the Red Sea - a huge body of water, they can't exactly swim across.

So no matter where they look it's bad news..either give up and surrender to Pharaoh's army and go back to Egypt, or drown in the Red Sea.

So what would you do in this situation? Well, the Israelites, who are scared, do what we would probably do. They get mad at the guy in charge...Moses. Listen to what they say: "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us out to the desert to die?...It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert"

So Moses turns around tells all of them what to do. And what he says to them, is what we all need to hear. Listen to this:

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."
Exodus 14:13-14

Moses tells the people: "What you need to is trust God. The same God who sent all the plagues on Egypt to rescue us is the same one that will deliver us all now! Watch and see!!" Exodus tells us that a cloud came down between the Israelites and the Egyptian army. On one side of the cloud the Egyptian army was in total darkness, but on the other side of the cloud Moses and all the Israelites could see just fine. It was as bright as the middle of the day.

It's at this point that many of you might know the story. At God's command Moses stretches his hand over the Red Sea and God parts the water. There is a runway right through the middle of the sea for all of the Israelites to walk through.

What had seemed impossible to the Israelites only a little while ago was now happening. They were escaping the Egyptians one last time...now they were free!

All of this happened, not because Moses was a brilliant leader, or because he was super smart. Millions of former slaves escaped one of the greatest armies on earth because they trusted in God. Even when it looked like God had messed up and they were trapped between an army and an ocean, God had an amazing plan to rescue them. The same God that rescued these slaves from Pharaoh is the God we can trust today. When our friends let us down, when we feel anxious and afraid, and when life doesn't turn out the way we want it to, we have a God we can always put our trust in. Because just as He was looking out for the Israelites, He is looking out for you.

What we think is impossible, is possible with God. Quite a story - and impossible things still happen every day - because we have an awesome God. Thanks for joining us today!

Prayer: Eternal God, we have gathered again, albeit virtually, this morning as members of your family to worship you as our Living God. Community-making God, you have called us to be in community with each other. Enable us to center ourselves for renewal in your presence, commitment to your mission, and ministry with the least of these, here and around the world. Equip us with your Holy Spirit to witness to your love and power, healing and reconciliation, nurturance and new life. Inspire us once again to be the tellers of the old, old story in ever new contexts, that Jesus has come so that all may have life, in fact, more than life, Life in its Fullness, through Jesus the Christ who taught us this prayer...

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME.

THY KINGDOM COME. THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD, AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES,

AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US, AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION,
BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL. FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM,

AND THE POWER, AND THE GLORY, FOR EVER AND EVER AMEN

Offertory:

Welcome to the Offering, our chance to give back. As United Methodists, we support many ministries, within the church, outside the church, at home and abroad. We are a giving people. This past week was Memorial Day. One ministry we have here at OCUMC is one that takes place at some of the hardest times in life. We have a funeral fellowship ministry that provides hospitality, food, and love during our memorial services here at church. Luckily, their services are needed very rarely, a couple of times a year on average. But they help families face these sad moments with gatherings where family and friends can share stories and celebrate life. Even their family members help serve by setting up table and chairs,, serving as ushers, handing out programs, and doing what it takes to put on a funeral here at church. We thank this team for their dedication and commitment to help others through tough times. We can do this, because of you. Your gifts and tithes make these services possible. If you would like to talk to someone about joining the Funeral Fellowship Team, let Mary Gifford know. Thanks!

Closing: At the Museum.