

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity, October 23, 2011

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 651, 24:1, 514, 428, 326:1-3.

Lessons: Exodus 13:17-14:14, Acts 7:20-42, Matthew 8:18-27.

Sermon Text: Exodus 14:15-31.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last week we talked about the Passover. Today we go to the very next chapter of God's chosen people in the Old Testament – their escape from Egypt. God did all the work of rescuing them.

The word "Exodus" means "going out", a special exiting, and because the second book of the Bible tells us about God's chosen people leaving Egypt, that is the name given to that book. We read in Hebrews 11:22: *"By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones."*

The Exodus is first of all leaving Egypt, but also refers to their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness before God delivered them into the land promised to Abraham. Today, let's look at

THE BEGINNING OF THE EXODUS

- 1. God guided them,**
- 2. God protected them, and**
- 3. God saved them.**

With the Passover, God prepared his people for their Exodus from Egypt. God chose their way. Many times after they left Egypt, they would have chosen things differently than God chose for them.

There were many reasons why God led them *"through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea."* The Egyptians were to be drowned in the Red Sea. The Israelites were to be humbled and tested in the wilderness. God had told Moses at the miracle of the burning bush that his people were to worship Him on Mount Sinai, also called Horeb. They had again and again told Pharaoh that they must go *"three days' journey into the wilderness to do sacrifice,"* and so God directed them toward the wilderness. Before they entered battle against their enemies, many things had to be set straight between them and their God: They must be taught to rely only upon the true God, laws must be given, covenants sealed. Another reason why God did not lead them on the nearest way was because the shortest route to Canaan, the Promised Land, would have brought them to *"the land of the Philistines."* They were not yet ready for war, much less for war with a powerful tribe like the Philistines. They had been slaves, not familiar with weapons of war. The Philistines were formidable enemies, too fierce for their first battles.

There is no mistaking the miracles that God used to lead, to protect and to rescue his people. God used a pillar or column of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to guide his people, to give them light at night, to remind them of his constant presence, and, in our sermon text on one occasion, to shield them from view of the Egyptian armies pursuing them.

After leaving the place in the fertile delta of the Nile River, called "Goshen", God led them in what appeared to the people as some very strange directions if they were to run away from the Egyptian armies.

"By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people." To guide and reassure them, God provided a sign before them day and night. In this way God showed Himself constantly to His children, revealing at the

same time His compassion for their anxiety on this journey and His understanding of the limitations of their faith. This was one constant standing miracle that stayed with them until they reached the Promised Land. This single column appeared either as a "cloud" or as "fire." This was the manifestation of the presence of God which moved ahead of the people to show them the way they were to go. This was a miraculous event recounted even by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4. ***"For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ."***

You heard in our Old Testament Lesson: ***"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.' And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD.'" So the Israelites did this.***" Exodus 14:1-4.

They were to "turn back" and in this way make the Egyptians think that they had lost their way. They knew very well the strength of the enemy, and their own weakness. ***"As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD."*** Because of the location of their camp, they could not escape. On the one hand was Pi-hahiroth, a range of craggy impassable rocks; on the other hand were Migdol and Baalzephon, which some think were forts and garrisons on the frontiers of Egypt and in front of them was the sea. Behind them were the Egyptians. In essence, the only way they could look for hope or rescue was up – and that is where their deliverance came from: the Lord God in heaven. But they were still terrified and complained to Moses that ***"It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"***

One of the most memorable events of the Exodus is God separating the waters so that they could cross over to safety on dry land. ***"Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long. 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, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left."***

How amazing that thousands upon thousands of people could cross quickly in the early morning before daybreak. The only light they had came from the Lord's pillar of fire which separated them from the Egyptians. The piling up of the water at either end of the dry area is a detail which would surely be remembered by the eyewitnesses! Then Israel had nothing to do but watch in silence while the Lord defeated the Egyptian army and drowned them. This event surely cannot be explained as a coincidence or as a purely natural phenomenon. ***"The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. During the last watch of the night the LORD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. He made the wheels of their chariots come off so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, 'Let's get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt.' Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen.' Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the LORD swept them into the sea. The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen--the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived."***

Explorations and archaeological research have given us some new ideas about where the descendants of Abraham likely wandered on their way from Egypt to Canaan. According to one count, nine different locations have been proposed for the sea the Israelites crossed. The name for that sea in Hebrew means "Sea of Reeds." It has historically been identified with the Gulf of Suez or the extension of the Gulf of Suez. Much of the northern part of that body of water is very shallow. Some have suggested the Gulf of Aqaba, farther to the east, with

other geographic features that suggest a complete entrapment of the Israelites as they were gathered up against the gulf. In addition, some suggest that a mountain in what is now Saudi Arabia, to the east of the Gulf of Aqaba in the land historically identified as Midian, where Moses spent 40 years, which is completely blackened on the top, as if it had been burned is a much better choice for Mount Sinai, which has for millennia been thought to be on the Sinai Peninsula. Remember that God appeared on Mount Sinai as a burning fire! However, we should not be too upset by not being able to find exact locations of some Biblical events, because there is the danger of worshiping some THING rather than the true God, as has happened with relics, such as “pieces of the true cross of Jesus” over the centuries. Recall, too, how each Lenten season Christian pilgrims claim to walk on the very stones in Jerusalem that Jesus walked on, although Jerusalem was totally destroyed barely a generation after Jesus was crucified!

Even after the mighty miracles – the ten plagues, ending with the Passover preceding the Exodus itself, the people did not respond with pure faith. Rather they grumbled and complained against Moses. This is a continuing theme throughout their journey to the Promised Land. Humanly speaking, they were rarely content with all that God did for them. In their troubles, they saw no human solution to their dilemmas and ultimately were forced to rely on God.

The Egyptians were angry with themselves for letting the Israelites go, and the Israelites were angry with God for the greatest kindness that was ever done them.

We must remember that God has the power to deliver and save His people in every crisis of life. Egypt refused to acknowledge Him as God and died – all their firstborn and their powerful army. Israel, despite their repeated sins and disobedience ultimately gained freedom and new identity as God’s chosen people from whom the Savior would come. Crossing the sea showed God has power over history, over human armies, and over nature. The Hebrews showed a lack of faith in God as they cringed in fear before Pharaoh and his army. Though God had led them up to this point, in the moment of crisis their faith wavered. They feared God had forsaken them. We must remember that failure to trust God is the root of all sin.

We can be assured that those whom God brings into a wilderness he will not leave nor lose there, but will take care to lead them through it. The Israelites – and we – must always put our trust in God, no matter how dark things may be. We must remember that we are always under divine guidance, and that ***“in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”*** Romans 8:28 Never forget that Scripture says in Hebrews 13:5 ***“God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”***

All who believe and trust in God may be confident that the Lord goes before them, as truly as he went before Israel in the wilderness. We must live by faith. And that is especially true when we think of the eternal salvation God has won for us through Jesus Christ.

In the picture of the Exodus, we are reminded of God’s saving us from the punishment we deserve because of our sins. ***“And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.”***

“Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: ‘I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.’” Exodus 15:1-2 Thus you have the end of the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea and the beginning of Moses’ song of praise to God, the beginning of many inspired hymns of praise to God for rescuing his people! Amen.