

Midweek of Lent 3

Out of Egypt: Through the Water

Texts: Exodus 14:13–31; Mark 1:9–13

Textual Notes

Exodus 14:13–31

Vv. 13–14: These verses make it clear that deliverance and salvation belong to the Lord. As the Egyptian army fast approaches, Moses assures the Israelites that the Lord will fight for them. They only have to be silent. This is a pattern established early in Scripture. From Genesis 3:15 on, whenever man attempts to help or save himself, there is failure. When God fights for man, there is victory. This pattern will continue on, even to the cross, as Christ wins for us the victory over sin, death, and Satan.

Vv. 15–16: It is important to note that the way of deliverance had not been revealed to Moses when he told the Israelites to stand firm and fear not. Moses demonstrates great faith when he tells the people that God will work their salvation. Now, in verses 15–16, God’s plan is revealed. Deliverance involves going through the waters, albeit on dry ground.

Vv. 17–18: God’s plan of deliverance for the Israelites will also involve giving glory to God over Pharaoh. The ten plagues have decimated any perceived effectiveness of the gods of Egypt. The tenth plague killed the son of Pharaoh, considered a god by the Egyptians. Now, in the waters of the Red Sea, the Lord will destroy Pharaoh himself.

Vv. 19–20: “The angel of God” is identified as the preincarnate Son of God, who has been leading the Israelites as a pillar of cloud. This is the same as the Glory Cloud, which reveals the presence of God with His people and yet conceals His face that they might live.

The pillar of cloud now moves behind the people to protect and separate them from the Egyptian army. The pillar of cloud becomes a pillar of fire by night.

Vv. 21–22: Although the dividing of the waters brings to mind the creation and the dividing of waters in Genesis 7–10, the verbs here in Exodus are not the same as in those Genesis texts.

Vv. 23–25: God hardened the hearts of the Egyptians (v. 17) so that they would pursue the Israelites into the midst of the Red Sea. Once the army is in the corridor between the walls of water, the Lord, by means of the pillar of fire and cloud, throws the army into confusion and causes the chariot wheels to be mired down. Immediately, the Egyptians recognize this as the hand of God and not some force of nature. “Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians.” All of this confusion allows the Israelites to pass safely through the sea, and it keeps the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.

Vv. 26–28: The Lord accomplishes a total victory over the nation of Egypt when Pharaoh and his army perish as the waters of the Red Sea return to their course. This victory becomes

known far and wide and strikes fear in the hearts of the surrounding nations. Forty years later, Rahab of Jericho references this event which might be the reason she comes to worship the One true God (Joshua 2:10).

V. 29: The re-emphasis of Israel's deliverance by walking on dry ground in the midst of the sea, while the Egyptians were destroyed by the same waters, points to the dual nature of water: it kills and gives life. God destroys through water, and He saves through water.

V. 30: There was physical evidence of God's victory as dead Egyptians lined the shores of the Red Sea.

V. 31: Most English versions translate this verse as, "Israel saw the great power that the Lord used." The Hebrew reads, "Israel saw the great hand that the Lord used." Again, this great and miraculous event gives credibility to Moses and his strengthened faith in the Lord.

Mark 1:9–13

V. 9: "In those days" indicates not just the beginning of a new section but also the beginning of something extraordinary—most likely something involving God's saving activity.

Jesus' Baptism by John takes place in the Jordan River. This location is important because of the ongoing death-and-new-life themes that surround the accounts of this river (Joshua 3–4; 2 Kings 2:1–14; 5:1–15).

V. 10: "When He came up out of the water": Much is made of this "coming up out"—but with an incorrect focus. This is not a reference to total immersion, nor is it a reference to steep river banks. Rather, this is a "death and new life (resurrection)" statement. One goes down into the water to die in order to come up out to new life. This pattern is seen with Moses (Exodus 2:1–10; 14:13–31), Naaman (2 Kings 5:1–15), and with Jonah. This, then, is the language used for Baptism in the New Testament.

"the heavens being torn open": This is more properly, "the heavens splitting," and it is used again with the splitting of the curtain in the temple in Mark 15:38.

"like a dove": The dove language appears in a similar fashion in Genesis 1:2 at creation—the Spirit hovered (like a bird) over the waters—and then in Genesis 8:8–12 when the waters from the flood are receding. Note these are creation—and new creation—events and are also connected to water.

V. 11: "My beloved Son" brings to mind God's command for Abraham to take his son (Isaac), whom he loved, and offer him as a sacrifice (Genesis 22; see notes for Lent 2).

Vv. 12–13: As in verse 10, Mark once again uses the term "immediately." Jesus is immediately driven into the wilderness for forty days and faces temptation by Satan.

Martin Luther indicates that at Jesus' Baptism, Jesus took all the sins of mankind upon Himself. This reversal (since Baptism cleanses us from sin) makes Jesus the Sin-bearer and, as with the scapegoat—or sin-bearer—of the Day of Atonement, Jesus takes those sins into the wilderness to Azazel, Satan. (See notes for Good Friday.)

The Water Motif (Death and Life)

The “Water” motif is perhaps one of the most well-known and most attested in Scripture. In the beginning, life was brought forth from the waters, but after the fall the waters also began to bring death. We first see this dual reality in the flood of Noah. The waters of the flood destroyed the world and all the evil people, and yet, at the same time, the waters saved and gave life to Noah and his family, eight people in all (1 Peter 3:20–21).

Following the flood, the motif appears again in the life of Moses. Hebrew baby boys were being drowned in the waters of the Nile, but Moses was placed in his own ark (basket) and saved by these same waters. Then, as the Israelites were fleeing the land of Egypt, the waters of the Red Sea were parted and the Israelites were saved, but the evil, hard-hearted Egyptian army was drowned in these same waters.

When the Israelites passed through the Jordan River into the Promised Land, the waters were parted again. In this case, the wilderness was a place of death and evil, but the Promised Land was a place of life and the Lord’s presence.

The account of Naaman and Elijah continues the motif. Naaman descended into the waters of the Jordan, a dead man with leprosy, but he came out with new flesh like that of a baby. Jonah was swallowed by the great fish and went into the depths of the sea for three days; but then he was vomited out on dry ground with new life. Even Jesus refers to this event as a sign of His own death and resurrection as He spends three days in the tomb and then rises to new life.

Jesus’ Baptism in the Jordan River shows a great reversal of the motif. As He is baptized, He does not receive life by the cleansing of His sins; rather, He takes on all of our sins as He becomes the Sin-bearer. For us, Baptism is our part in this biblical motif as our old Adam is drowned and the new Adam comes forth.

Sermon

Slavery—bondage—servitude. Brutal taskmasters—heavy burdens—daily despair and hopelessness. This was the land of Egypt for the Israelites. Four hundred years prior, the land of Egypt was a place of refuge, a place of rescue. It was a place that promised food in the midst of famine, a land that gave the Hebrews a home at a time when things were becoming desperate. But that had all changed. A pharaoh had ascended to the throne who did not know, who did not acknowledge the great deeds and works of Joseph. Now, the Hebrew people had become a source of cheap labor. Now, the Hebrew people were enslaved to carry out the building projects of the pharaoh. Now, slavery, bondage, and servitude, brutal taskmasters and heavy burdens were their lot, and they groaned under this reality.

Even though the Israelites had journeyed willingly to the land of Egypt, and even though they had been blessed in this journey by plentiful grain and the beautiful land of Goshen as their dwelling place, what had once been a good and gracious land had become a place of enslavement. What had once been a place a refuge became a place of pain and sorrow. What had

once been a place of life became a place of death—a land of exile where their baby boys were thrown into the Nile River. And the Hebrews were helpless to break free and escape Egypt.

The people were in need of a leader. They were in need of a savior. They needed a leader to arise from their midst, a leader who would gather them together. One who would remind them of who they were and who their God was—and who they were in relationship to this God. They needed one who would bring them out of this terrible land of slavery and death. They needed someone who could and who *would* stand up to Pharaoh. So God sent Moses.

We could spend time talking about Moses and his abilities, or lack thereof. We could speak of his training, his education, and his reluctance. We could speak of his temper, of his wimpiness, of his lack of desire to carry out the task. We could speak at great length about all of these things; but God equipped Moses for the task and then sent him to rescue His people. One stubborn pharaoh and ten plagues later, Moses and the Israelites finally leave town after four hundred years. Moses and the Israelites are headed back to the land that was promised by God to His people from the days of Abraham.

However, two obstacles remain between them and their rescue. Two obstacles stand in the way of their return from exile: a large army and a big body of water. Two obstacles and the Israelites are right in the middle of both of them. Pharaoh and his army are coming up fast from behind, and the Red Sea looms large ahead. They are stuck between the proverbial “rock and a hard place;” but God has a plan, a way, a means by which to save His people.

The Lord God tells Moses to raise his staff over the waters of the Red Sea; miraculously, stupendously, the waters part, and the people pass through the waters on dry ground. As the people go through the waters, they are rescued from the land of slavery and death. The people cross over as they begin their return from exile. And then, to tie up all the loose ends and to deliver a message, the waters collapse on the advancing Egyptian army. Pharaoh and his army are destroyed in the waters. The evil is washed away. In the words of Moses, God says to His 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. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.” And so the Hebrew people are saved by the waters.

There is life and death in those waters. The same waters that destroy the evil pharaoh and his army save the people of God. The Egyptians are drowned, and the Israelites walk away alive. The waters that killed also preserved life. This will not be the last time the Lord uses water to destroy the enemy and give life to His people. This will not be the last time the Lord uses water to bring His people back from exile.

A land of bondage, a land of slavery to sin and death—slaves of Satan, enemies of God. The enemies—sin, death, and Satan—still seek to enslave God’s people. Indeed, these enemies are successful, for we groan under the terrible burden of everlasting death. The people need—we need—to escape, but alas, we cannot. We need a Savior. We need a Savior, a Deliverer to rise from our midst. A Savior who will gather us up and bring us out of this land of exile. We need a Savior who will reunite and restore us to God. We need One who will stand up to Satan and his

evil power. So God sent Jesus.

We could spend some time speaking about Jesus and His abilities. We could speak of His power, of His lineage, of His sacrifice, of His love and mercy, but suffice it to say that in Jesus, God became flesh to dwell among us and rescue us from our land of exile. Jesus went down into the waters of the Jordan to be baptized by John—not to be washed clean of sin, for He had none. No, Jesus went down into the waters of the Jordan to take all of the world's sins upon Himself and to go into the wilderness to take them back to the father of sin, Satan.

The obstacle to our return from exile—the dividing wall of hostility that was raised between us and God by sin, death, and Satan—is removed. Christ went down into the waters and gathered all sin to Himself in order that waters might be cleansed and prepared for our own journey through the waters.

Down into the waters of Baptism we go, and our old Adam is drowned as all sin is washed away. Up from the waters we arise, a new Adam, a new creation, a child of God. We come up from these sacramental waters into the promised land of everlasting life. Returned from exile, returned from a land of slavery, through the waters, into the arms of God. In Jesus' name. Amen.