

Sermon – September 8, 2024
“I drew him up out of the water”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill open hearts and anoint the sharing of these words. Bless those who hear them, use them to fan the flames of our continuing transformation into Christ's image, and lead us out into fruitful labor in Jesus' mission right here, right now. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen

The Spirit of Jesus in me greets the Spirit of Jesus in you and brings us together in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Good morning! This is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it! I have a new one for us to learn during the coming weeks. If I were to say, “I was glad when they said to me,” what would your response be? “Let us go to the house of the Lord.” Let’s try that: “I was glad when they said to me.” “Let us go to the house of the Lord!” We may need to write that one down where we wrote the other ones down.

Our journey through the book of Acts is over and we have moved to one of my favorite Old Testament books, Exodus. We will be journeying with the Hebrews in their Exodus from cruel slavery to the Promised Land until the start of Advent. Let me encourage us to read the book of Exodus this fall. Exodus is a key book in God’s plan to restore His people to a relationship with Him. As we journey, we will glimpse what it means to be released from cruel bondage into a new relationship with God. The Exodus of the Hebrews parallels every believer’s exodus from sin into an eternal relationship with God through Jesus. In Exodus, Moses will be the one through whom God works. In the lives of believers, it is Jesus Christ. In Exodus, the

move is out of the slavery in Egypt to new life as God's people in the Promised Land. For believers, exodus is our journey out of sin and its consequence of death into eternal life with Jesus through whom we are reconciled to God. We will not cover one chapter a week as we did with Acts as there are forty chapters in Exodus and we don't have that many weeks. So, start reading and journeying along with the Hebrews as they move out of Egypt and slavery into new life with God. Seedbed is running a series on Exodus during this time on their daily Wake-Up Call, and I encourage us to join with them as sower in chief, JD Walt, starts each day with scripture from Exodus, insights for us to consider, and a hymn of praise to God. You can find the link to the Wake-Up Call in the bulletin.

Let me give us a quick top-level view as we move into Exodus. Exodus begins in the Garden of Eden when the serpent tempts Adam and Eve, and they disobey God by eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Sin enters into humanity, and we are lost in our sin and separated from God. But God has a plan to restore us to Him. That plan moves forward through Noah, who in response to God's call, builds an ark and rides out the flood, keeping a remnant alive. God's plan moves on through Abraham, whom God calls to leave his home and go to the land of Canaan and there Abraham enters into a covenant with God that through his descendants all the people of the earth will be blessed. God's plan continues to move through Abraham's descendants as Joseph is moved from the land of Canaan to Egypt to deliver the descendants of Abraham from a famine that sweeps the world. Joseph delivers his family and the Egyptians by storing grain in the abundant years and distributing it during the years of famine. Abraham's descendants, some 70 in number, settle in the best part of the land of Egypt and are there for 400 years. All seems to be well as God prospers His people there until a new pharaoh arises in Egypt who does not know Joseph. The previous pharaohs of Egypt had recognized that God's hand was on the Hebrews and that Egypt was blessed and sustained through them, but in time a new pharaoh comes to power who does not know the God of the Hebrews and thinks he himself is god. The theme of knowing God in Exodus is a key theme. The idea of knowing God will occur over 100 times in this book. "Knowing" in the Old Testament is not me being familiar with you, like I might know your name or a bit about you. It is so much more than that. We also see this idea of knowing when a couple marries and they enter into a marriage relationship. Knowing is a deep commitment and concern between the parties for each other's welfare. In the New Testament, Paul shares that his desire is to know Jesus and the power

of the resurrection. Paul wants to know Jesus. In Exodus, we will find the new pharaoh saying he does not know the God of the Hebrews. His lack of a desire to know this God will be a tragic mistake for himself and Egypt. We can also see another theme of Exodus developing around this idea of knowing God. Those who know God will be cared for and will exodus out of cruel bondage to a new relationship with God. Those who do not know God will face the consequence of such a decision. This theme parallels the idea of those today who know Jesus as their savior and those who do not.

Since the new pharaoh does not know God, he misses that God's unseen hand is at work among the Hebrews bringing about the multiplication of His people. God's creational work of multiplying His people so that they may fill the land and be fruitful is seen by Pharaoh as a threat and not a blessing, and in response, Pharaoh fears the Hebrew people and takes action to stop or control their growth. First, he tries enslaving them and putting them to forced labor which fails as God continues to multiply His people. Next, Pharaoh tries to control their growth by having midwives kill their baby boys. That also fails as the midwives fear God more than they fear Pharaoh and will not kill babies.

Yet Pharaoh is not done. In true evil king fashion, he next commands the Hebrews to throw their baby boys into the Nile River so that they will drown and die. This is genocide and will eliminate God's people and God's plan for redemption through them. The consequences of not following this order from Pharaoh are not given in the scripture, but must have been enough that the Hebrew slaves followed the command. It is with great difficulty that I visualize Hebrew families along the banks of the Nile throwing in their babies. I cannot imagine the pain and suffering that must have come with compliance to this decree from Pharaoh. The image I have of a father tossing his newborn child into the waters is very difficult for me. Pharaoh seems to have scored a victory and found an evil way to deal with the people of God and their multiplication.

Yet God is not done. God gives a baby boy to a Hebrew couple and when they see the beauty of their child, they hide him for three months until they can no longer keep his presence a secret. It is time for the trip to the Nile and the long empty walk back. But this mom decides she will not comply directly with the command from Pharaoh but will have faith in God, the one true God, to care for her son. She builds a basket from papyrus and covers it with tar. She puts her son into an ark. The word in our text for the basket she constructs is the same Hebrew word for the boat Noah built to carry him through the flood. Her plan is to put her child into the Nile but

to have faith that God will care for him. She will comply with the command from Pharaoh but will place her son into the hands of God. His parents carry out their plan and leave the basket in the water with the baby's sister to watch to see what will happen. At this moment, in this place, comes Pharaoh's daughter to bathe in the Nile, escorted by her servants. She sees the basket in the water and sends one of her maids to retrieve it. She opens it and finds the baby boy crying inside. The text tells us Pharaoh's daughter has pity on the child. She knows what her father has decreed but out of her pity, she is open to caring for the child as her own. And into this key moment of time speaks the baby's older sister, asking Pharaoh's daughter if she would like a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby for her. That provision for the child seems fitting for Pharaoh's daughter and she hires the baby's mother to nurse the child, her own son, and raise him up until he is ready for adoption. When the child is at the age for adoption, he is taken to Pharaoh's home to be raised there, to learn the ways of the Egyptians, and to gain access to the ruling class of Egypt. God moves through His people and works through those who are not to bring about His will. The baby is drawn from the water and that is the name given to him by Pharaoh's daughter, Moses. God provides a deliverer for His people and has him raised in the house of Pharaoh. The faith of his parents in God and their willingness to trust God to care for their son allow God to act through them and other women, Pharaoh's daughter and her maid servants, to move Moses out of the Nile and into the palace of Pharaoh. Game, set, and match for God. Pharaoh will be defeated by a baby his own daughter will raise in his house. God's people will be set free from cruel bondage by a deliverer sent from God. The unseen God's name is not mentioned until later in our reading. To this point, God is at work both through His people and those who work against Him to bring good, to bring forth a deliverer through whom God will work to release His people from cruel bondage. Don't miss that God works through people who have faith in Him to bring about His will and also works through those who do not have faith to bring about good for His people. While God has not been mentioned in Exodus to this point, He is at work bringing about the release of His people from cruel slavery to service to Him.

Don't miss that God uses the lowly and faithful who dare to trust Him to bring about deliverance of His people. We have seen four women and a child used by God to save the life of a baby cast out onto the waters of the Nile in faith for God's caring and protection. Their actions in faith open possibilities for God to act. We, as followers of Jesus, are to let Jesus work through us to draw others out of the waters of death and bondage to sin, and save them from drowning in

their sin to become those who are set free from sin and have eternal life reconciled through Christ to the Father. We come together as the body of Christ here at Fairfields Methodist Church and Afton Methodist Church to learn, grow in our faith, and trust in Jesus that we might be those who are Jesus' witnesses in this place.

Our journey with the Hebrews is just beginning. Moses is just a child being raised up in Pharaoh's home. The Hebrews are still in cruel bondage. The command to kill baby boys is still in place, but may have been tempered by the presence of Moses in Pharaoh's home. Through it all, an unseen God is at work. Pharaoh does not yet know the one true God, but God is at work through people bringing about the deliverance of His people. God, through Moses, will move the Hebrews from cruel service in Egypt to service to God in the wilderness and then on to serve Him in the Promised Land. There are many exciting and fascinating moments to come in our Exodus journey. Moses points us to Jesus who, through his suffering, death, and resurrection, moves his followers from death to life eternal with God. In our Exodus journey, we will experience the first Passover of unleavened bread when God's people are brought out of Egypt by God's mighty hand, and they must leave their homes so quickly that there is no time for the bread in their mixing bowls to rise. The Hebrews will be driven out of Egypt due to the death of their first born children and the Egyptian's fear they will all die while the Hebrew's children are spared by the blood of a lamb that they smear on the doorposts and lintels of their homes, a moment the Hebrews will celebrate for all time. Jesus changes their Passover celebration into a new act of worship, Communion, where we partake of the bread that represents his broken body and of the fruit of the vine that represents the blood he shed for us that washes us clean and frees us from our cruel bondage to sin.

Let's move this morning into a time of communing with Jesus, a time of coming together, breaking bread, and sharing the fruit of the vine that allows us to remember what Jesus did for us, and a time to commune with him as he comes to us and is present in the great mystery of Communion. As we prepare our hearts this morning, let us think about our lives and where we have the opportunity to say no to what our culture embraces that is against God's will and to instead have faith in God so that God can work through us to draw life out of the river of chaos that evil creates around us. We are not seeking to be protesters of the chaos brought about by those who do not know God, but to be those who move into places where we are led by Holy

Spirit where we trust in God and allow Him to act through our own efforts to bring life out of death.

Pray with me: Jesus come and guide us to love others as you love so that we might be those who have faith to send out onto the water of our lives arks of your love. Show us how to draw people out of the waters of chaos created by evil that we all face today. Increase our faith that we might trust you enough to release ourselves to your will. We pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because he has anointed us to bring good news to the poor. He has sent us to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Go forth into Jesus' mission.