

Sermon – October 20, 2024
“I will sing to the Lord”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Exodus 14:26—15:13, 20-21

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. Visit, fill hearts open to you, and transform us into Christ's image through the anointing of these words. Bless those with ears to hear and inspire us to move 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! “The grass withers and the flowers fail,” “but the word of our God endures forever.” Kay and I ventured into Walmart this past week. We needed a few things and of course we needed to stock up on candy for our upcoming Trunk or Treat event. As I walked the aisles of the store, I was approached by a young man riding on an electric cart wearing a t-shirt with a message on the front. I could not read it as it was partly obscured and so I asked him what it said. He stopped and shared that the message was that he had been clean for 100 days. That which once bound him has been vanquished! I hope that I was an encourager for him as I praised him and encouraged him to keep clean and to never give up. What a testimony! I am glad he was wearing a shirt proclaiming his victory and progress and that I was stirred to ask.

Now, if we would share our testimonies with each other about how Jesus set us free from bondage to sin and death, some of our testimonies would be dramatic and would speak to how we met Jesus at the bottom in a dark, desperate place and light was poured into us. Some would share how as young children our hearts were stirred to surrender to Jesus, and we did. Some might share that at the end of a confirmation class, we stood before a congregation, confessed Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and began to follow him. Some might share how later in life we found truth in the love of Jesus and surrendered our life to him. If we would share our stories of how we met Jesus, the stories would bless us and they would all be unique. None of our stories would be the exact same story. They would all include the love of Jesus, but they would be individual stories of how we each came to faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

If we were Jewish and were going to share our testimony of how we met God, then as we went around the room we would hear the same exact story each time. All would have the same testimony. It would be the story of Passover: the shed blood of a lamb; the death of the first born of Egypt; a three-day journey into the wilderness; being trapped by the sea with no escape; fleeing on dry land through the Red Sea; the army of Egypt coming after us through the sea, rapidly drawing closer and closer, intent on returning us to slavery; the waters of the sea closing in on the army and all being destroyed. The Jewish testimony would continue as each would say that as we witnessed their dead bodies washed up on the shore and saw that they now had no power over us, our fears were gone, and we begin to follow God, seeking to have His presence among us. Each Jewish person among us would have this same testimony as if they each were present that day on the shore of the Red Sea.

Let's focus our minds this morning on the response of the people of Israel as they realize what has happened as they now stand on the shore of the Red Sea. The nation of Israel is standing on the opposite shore of the Red Sea. They have been redeemed from slavery in Egypt. God has had final victory over those who were coming to destroy and enslave them again. The waters of the Red Sea have closed over their enemies and only their dead bodies are seen again. Those who were about to wreck chaos, pain, and enslavement on the people of Israel are drowned in the waters of the Red Sea. The army of Pharaoh is defeated and no longer a threat to the people of God. In one moment, there was growing panic and fear that Egypt would pass through the sea and be upon them, and in the next instant, the waters returned and Egypt's army was gone. The threat from Egypt is over.

Moses' response to what God has just done, this great victory over a foe who was far more powerful than God's people, people whose only hope for salvation was God, people who now stand as free people on the opposite shore of the Red Sea from Egypt, people who begin to realize that Egypt's great army is defeated, destroyed, and will never harass them again, is worthy of our attention. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., "Egypt symbolized evil in the form of humiliating oppression, ungodly exploitation, and crushing domination"¹ God has defeated evil and set His people free to follow Him. Think about what our response might be if we were standing on the shore of the Red Sea at that moment. How would we respond? Try to imagine the scene. The people of God, Israel, are standing on the banks of the Red Sea, dead bodies and parts of chariots are washing up on the shore, and it is quiet. The only sounds we would expect at the seashore are present, a silence broken by the cries of an occasional sea bird and breaking waves. Into this sudden quiet a new sound begins quietly; someone begins to sing.

At first there is only one voice singing and that voice begins to sing praises to God. Moses begins to lift up a song from his heart to God who has saved the people of Israel from their mighty foe. In my mind's eye, after those around Moses on the shore hear him start to sing and they realize he is praising God who has saved them all, those around Moses begin to join with him and the praise to God spreads and spreads until all are united in song, giving praise to God who has saved them. Can we picture that beautiful scene in our minds? Think 600,000 plus people singing praise to God. The people of God realize they have been saved from a cruel, oppressive, relentless enemy from whom they had no hope of rescue, and their response is to glorify God by singing. God is glorified in our praise.

At some point in this time of singing, Miriam is also moved to sing and dance, and begins in joy to praise God with song, tambourine, and dance. And again, women around her respond. They too bring out their tambourines. They pick up her song and together all of the women dance and give praise to God who redeems. The people of God are worshiping God. Their response to what God has done for them is to sing, to worship the Holy One who has saved them from certain death and evil enslavement. Their enemies who pursued them now lay dead in the water or on the shore of the Red Sea, no longer a threat. Their enslavement is over. God acted and is now the ruler of the nation of Israel. They owe God a debt and the way they say thank you for the mercy and love He has shown them is they sing a song to God recounting what He has done for them. They worship the one true God. They are now free to have God in their presence and

journey with Him through the wilderness to the Promised Land on a journey where they will begin to know the God who saves.

I have been blessed many times in my life by worship in song in a large crowd. Let me share one memory of a time when praise to Jesus broke out in a crowd. Our family was standing on the side of a mountain in Pennsylvania on a summer evening with about 80,000 other people. It had been a day of learning about Jesus and an evening of entertainment by popular and often very loud and showy bands. The crowd gathered there greatly enjoyed the evening and music. But the last person to step onto the stage that evening was Chris Tomlin. He was alone, carrying only a guitar and was quite a contrast to others who had come to the stage that evening. And he began to sing and to invite the crowd to sing praises to God. And they did sing with him and praised God in and through song. When he was done and stopped, the singing continued across the side of that mountain. It was high and light and moved around in the crowd as if angels in heaven were still singing praises and giving glory to King Jesus for what he has done for us.

Think for a moment about why we come to worship on Sunday morning. Our reasons may vary: fellowship, a desire to know Jesus more, seeking a better life, our parents making us attend, or we are curious. We have many reasons why we come, but the reason we should be coming to church is so that we might worship God and the Lamb, who defeated the most evil and cruel form of slavery: sin and death. We, like the people of Israel, come to worship the one who has redeemed us. We come to show our gratitude and to gather together to worship the one who has given us salvation. As we begin to know Jesus and start to realize what it means that Jesus was placed on the cross, bled, and died that we might be set free from sin and death, our response, like Moses and the people of Israel, is to worship. We do that by coming together, praising God for what He has done, is doing, and will do in our lives. We come into His presence as a gathered body of people who are the local church, and together we seek to worship Him. If we have gratitude for what Jesus has done for us, then we also should worship, raise our voices, and praise him for the mighty work that God did through Jesus, setting us free from sin and death.

Let us stop and think about what Jesus has done for us. Let the steadfast love of God seen through the magnitude of the cross and our salvation begin to grow in our minds and take root as gratitude in our hearts. We should remember our own baptism, or recall that we have been baptized, and grasp that through our baptism we have passed out of the water as the people of

Israel did, and Jesus has destroyed our enemies not by fighting them with weapons of war but by dying so that we might live and be reconciled to God in Christ through Holy Spirit.

At one time in our history, Methodists had the reputation as those who sang and gave glory to God. The songs and hymns in our hymnal are testimony to our desire to worship King Jesus in song. This morning, I am going to attempt to do something I have never done. I want to invite us into a time of worship through song and expressions of gratitude for what Jesus has done for us. As I begin to sing, I invite you to join me as you are led and moved by the Spirit. I also want to give you permission to do what the Spirit leads you to do. If there is a desire to raise your hand or hands, then do so, If there is a desire to dance, then step out into the aisle and dance before the Lord. If you find something on your heart, then come to the altar and pray. If you need to surrender something to Jesus, then come to the altar and surrender whatever Jesus is calling you to leave behind. If you want to sit and listen, then do so. Moses' leadership of the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt points to our own journey in Christ through the waters of our baptism into the kingdom of God. As followers of Jesus, what lie behind us are dead and powerless enslavers who were slain by Jesus' death and resurrection. Sin and death have been destroyed. Christ has died and Christ is risen. Our response is worship.

I would like to end this morning by offering a song and inviting you as you are led by the Spirit to join with me in gratitude to Jesus to raise our voices and worship King Jesus. Let us praise God for the victory Jesus won over sin and death on the cross for us. The words will be on the screen. Join as you are led.

I love you, Lord, and I lift my voice to worship you.

Oh, my soul, rejoice!

Take joy, my King, in what you hear;

Let it be a sweet, sweet sound in your ear.

Pray with me: Jesus, we are filled with gratitude as we look back at our lives and see the death of our sin through your love extended to us on the cross. Jesus, we offer you our worship in song this morning and ask that you would lead us into a deeper expression of your love in our lives.

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. Jesus, we lift up our hands and spread them out as we cry out for salvation for your people in this place.

Go forth into Jesus' mission. Amen

ⁱ Fretheim, Terence E.. Exodus: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (p. 169). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.