

## *Liberation Power*

Exodus 14:19-31 Crossing the sea

Exodus 15:1-18 Song of Moses

That song 'Go Down Moses' has such a power to it, partly because it comes out of a culture and an experience of people who have lived through one of the cruelest kinds of oppression and have come out of that into a moment of freedom, and exemplify that timeless story of the Hebrew people in slavery in Egypt, and one person called by God to go and declare the freedom of these people, not just declare it to the people, the slaves, but to declare their freedom to the Pharaoh, to the oppressor. That story continues to capture our imagination with such power today.

Part of the energy of that story is a combination of two elements. It's the people, the choice and the courage of the ones who are enslaved, and it's this act of God that has brought them out of slavery. It puts them both in so clearly and so powerfully. It's not a story about people being passive and waiting for God to change the world for them, and it's not a story of people just rising up on their own power. It's the story of people who were slaves, enslaved and therefore in a powerless position. They didn't have the ability to just stand up and walk out and go get another job and live somewhere else. There was no direct flight to Palestine. They need there to be a transcendent power that moved in their lives.

So we have the whole rich tradition of God's redemptive power that is a key part of our theology. At the same time, these are people who found the courage. Moses inspired them to believe, to believe what for them would have been unbelievable, to believe that they could be free, and to open their lives, their hearts, their people to God's will by marking their door posts with the lamb's blood, believing that God would do something amazing in their lives and having the courage. Imagine how much courage that took? Imagine how scared they were of the slave drivers of Egypt and the chariots and the armies? Imagine them in their conversations, 'This is silly. We get together and stand up and walk out of here, they'll just crush us. Our lives will be worse than ever if we even survive.' And yet, from deep in their hearts, they found the courage to believe that they could be free, and to therefore, walk out. Walk out of their houses to march to the sea where they could drown, trusting that God was leading them, and profoundly trusting that it was not God's intention for them to be slaves, but God's intention for them to be free. To believe it was God's intention for them to be free.

Since that time there are many groups and movements that have used that model, that picture of liberation to inspire the ongoing evolution of freedom and dignity of people in our world. In particular, the women's liberation movement, through which most of us have lived in this culture in the recent decades. When we think back to think about how things are today with how they were in the 1950s or 1940s, it's amazing how much has changed. Certainly there are still places where there's more to go, but it's amazing how much has changed. And the Black liberation movement has explicitly modeled itself on that picture of Moses leading the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt.

How is it that the moment comes with people living with that kind of oppression when it's time? That's one of the great mysteries. Martin Luther King once said, 'There comes a time when people get sick and tired of being sick and tired.' That's as simply as it can be put. There comes a time, a moment in the life of every slave when it's time.

We have also to look at our own lives in terms of captivity. A book that I read way back when I was starting out in ministry entitled, 'Preaching to Suburban Captives' shaped my thinking, has shaped it throughout my career, because we all agonize over the ways our lives get stuck in ruts, the way we sell our souls to those things that are not God's, the way we feel trapped in consumerism or our addictions. Addiction is a loss of freedom, is a form of slavery, whether it's physical addictions or emotional or spiritual addictions.

More recently we have faced the realities of a vast array of kinds of slavery, of kinds of captivity, kinds of oppression in our culture, and when we think about them, each one contains its own agony and for none of them is the liberation complete, but at the same time each one is an area of celebration for us as we see what God is doing with the people whom he does not intend to be slaves.

We've grappled with spousal abuse, struggling with the horrible reality of bullying at school and the resultant child and teen suicides, bullying in the workplace, child abuse, sexual abuse, and the horrifying incidence in so many parts of the world of genocide, including the Jewish Holocaust, the oppression of homosexuals both when it's been legal and when it's been illegal, labor injustice, not just in Indonesia but right here in North America, the treatment of aboriginal people right here in our own country, not just other parts of the world. Apartheid, such a depth of suffering, yet such an inspiring move toward freedom and liberation and reconciliation in South Africa, and the ongoing tragedy of refugees all over the world, losing their homes, their dignity, their livelihood because of war and injustice.

Each one of those represents a segment of people who have been oppressed, enslaved, denied their dignity. And now, with the so-called Arab Spring, countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria are catching a vision of a freedom and dignity for which they have longed for so long and finding the courage to depose their tyrants. It's a profound thing for people to find the courage to walk out, to step out of the closet, to just say no, to take a seat on the bus, to start the revolution, to march for freedom. And in all of this, there is a theology, a

liberation theology, a way of understanding God's ways with the world and it's very simple.

This freedom is what God intends. We can get a whole library of liberation theologies, but it comes down to nothing more than that. This freedom, this dignity for all human beings everywhere is what God intends and it's what God is doing, and it is what is happening in our world. You really want to get in touch with what's happening, really want to have your eyes open so that you can see the world and you can see what is happening in the world. You really want to know that and to see it.

This is what you get to see. This is what God is up to, what God is about in our world. And there is an ecclesiology to this too, an understanding of the church and its identity and its purpose and it is simply this: the Church is called to stand in solidarity with the oppressed, the captive and the abused. That's at the heart of the Church's calling. That's at the heart of the Church's mission, what we're called to do and what we're called to be, and it's at the heart of the best of the Church's history, a history of standing in solidarity with so many of these different groups and different people in our society and in our culture and around the world. This is the Church at its best.

So, I want to invite you all, in a moment now but in your life, in your days and your weeks and your years and your spiritual practice, to reflect on this question: in what ways are we ourselves captive? With whom do we feel called to stand in solidarity in their freedom struggle? How is the Church called to be a channel of God's liberating power in world?

Amen.