

September 13, 2020

**“Sing to God a New Song”  
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake**

*Scripture Readings:*

*Exodus 14:19-31*

*The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.*

*Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt."*

*Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.*

*Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.*

*Psalms 103:(1-7), 8-13*

*Bless God, O my soul, and all that is within me,  
bless God's holy name.*

*Bless God, O my soul, and do not forget all God's benefits--  
who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,  
who redeems your life from the Pit,  
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,  
who satisfies you with good as long as you live  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.  
God works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.  
God made known God's ways to Moses,  
and God's acts to the people of Israel.  
God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger*

*and abounding in steadfast love.  
God will not always accuse, nor will God be angry forever.  
God does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our iniquities.  
For as the heavens are high above the earth,  
so great is God's steadfast love towards those who fear God;  
as far as the east is from the west,  
so far God removes our transgressions from us.  
As a father and mother have compassion for their children,  
so God has compassion for those who fear God.*

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So did you notice how different these two scriptures are?

In Exodus we have the most amazing display of God's power, second only to creating the world in seven days. In the Psalm however we see God as loving and forgiving like a parent. I tend to embrace the second image of God more and here's why.

When we see this display of God's power and believe it to be literal then we are left asking "why can't God do that now?" Why can't God fix this virus? Why can't God cure my cancer? Why didn't God save my child? Why can't God stop the wildfires and feed the children? It is only one step in logic to conclude that if God can break into human events like that and doesn't, then God must not care about us that much anymore. He must not be on our side like he was the Israelites. That doesn't ring true to me.

I also struggle with the idea that our God didn't give a hoot for the Egyptians. Now I can see him being angry at them but to drown them and their horses too. That just doesn't jibe.

Now don't get me wrong I do believe in miracles. Every day an alcoholic or drug addict doesn't take a drink or drug that is a miracle to me and the life restored that follows is a miracle too.

The tenacity and courage of people in our congregation that have faced cancer head on, you are walking miracles. Those of you that have survived incredible losses you too are miracles.

And I would wager that you felt God's presence with you, felt closer to God through it all. When you look back you see God was on your side and slowly but surely made a path for you to cross through the pain and struggle. Right?

I have always had a problem with insurance companies calling hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and the like, "acts of God". That very notion takes us back to scenes like this in the scripture in a very literal way. I think when a small child who has just been burned out of their home hears this, it is highly unlikely that child will feel like God is someone they want in their life.

But here is where we see God in events like that; in the bravery of the first responders, in the heart and hands of the neighbors working together to rescue and then rebuild, who when

interviewed invariably say “God is getting us through this”. That’s how I understand God to work in human history. Through courage, fortitude, willingness, kindness, perseverance and of course Love.

Back to the scripture on the Exodus. There’s an old Native-American saying “I don’t know if it happened this way but I know this story to be true”.

When we take this scripture seriously but not literally here is what we know to be true. God wants us to be free, God despises oppression, God will surely make us a path that we can not see when we are standing on a cliff overlooking a raging sea of grief or fear.

God will make us a path through and be with us every step of the way as we slog through the mud pursued by our darkest fears. Bless God Oh My Soul. There are so many of you in this congregation that know exactly what I am talking about for you have had your own Red Sea to cross.

Now many people claim a right to God, proclaiming that God is on their side but in reality there are no sides with God, no favorites. Jesus embodied this, he taught us that every single one of us matters to God.

God still despises the evil acts we do to each other but each of us, matters to God. We are all a part of God and knowing that to our core is the foundation of a good life, come what may.

Now it is not lost on me that today was traditionally “Rally Day”. I’m sure you all could close your eyes and in an instant think back to a time when this church was teeming with families and kids. Alive with energy as you rallied together to kick off Fall events.

I know to think of that can bring you down but the only way we have, like the Israelites, is forward. That is where our path leads.

So as you think about this coming year ask yourself. What can we rally around now? I believe you all have already begun that transition. You rally now around mission. You rally around each other and pray for each other, support each other, and you are there for each other.

You rally around continuing to expand your minds and broaden your spiritual life.

You rally around continuing to extend our hospitality to the community. This church is alive with the voices of our community. Parkside Community Church. Our church gives a place to Catholics to become closer to the spirit of God, it shelters children for the Y. It houses the homeless, it feeds the the hungry. It is still the very presence of God in so many ways.

You rally now around continuing the work of Jesus in this world and you rally around our faith. Our faith in a God that is always with us and wants us to be free from all that binds us. Our God that clears us a path and is with us every step of the way. AMEN