

‘The Way Forward’
Exodus 14:1-25
Rev. Curtis Bablitz
September 17th, 2023

Imagine: You are standing on a stony beach at the edge of a great sea. Before you stretches a vast expanse of open water, churned up by strong winds from the south, with towering waves crashing against the rocks you stand on, sending salt and spray up into the air, filling your breath with the tang of the water. You are surrounded by a crowd of people, refugees, all their worldly possessions with them, piled on carts or donkeys or on their backs, children and the elderly and pregnant women among them, milling about in uncertainty or sitting, exhausted, on the slick wet rocks.

Behind you in the distance you can hear a dull roar – the hoofbeats and cannon-fire of an approaching army, growing louder and louder as your enemies draw nearer and nearer. Before you, behind you, all around you, there is only chaos, only fear, only death. There is no way out. And then God speaks. The word of the Lord comes to a human being, as God tells you to stretch out your hands. And as you reach out over the water, over the chaos, over the barrier that stands between your people and freedom, that wall begins to crumble. The waters lurch and roil and then fall back, the sea is broken in two, as a path through the darkness appears before the people. It is not an easy road; the people will need to scramble over the exposed sea bed, still pursued by their enemies, and they will journey for years through wilderness and rebellion, but

from this moment onward, there is a way forward, a way that leads to freedom, to salvation, to the promised land.

And now, again, Imagine: You are standing on a stony hill outside an ancient city. Before you atop the hill stand three crosses, three devices of execution and torture and cruel, twisted justice. All around you stand soldiers, agents of death and destruction, dedicated only to preserving control regardless of the cost. Behind you, you can hear the roar of the crowd, calling out for death, for vengeance, for their thirst for spectacle and blood to be satisfied. Before you, behind you, all around you, there is only chaos, only fear, only death. There is no way out. And then God speaks. The word of the Lord comes as a human being, and God tells him to stretch out his hands. And as those hands are fixed upon that cross, as they are spread apart to encompass the entire world, all the chaos, all the barriers that stand between God and humanity, the walls begin to crumble. The curtain in the temple is torn in two, everything that could possibly separate or interfere with God's love for creation, it is broken in two, as a path through the darkness appears before the people. It is not an easy road; it will lead on through the valley of the shadow of death, into the night, into the heart of pain and suffering, into the tomb itself, and yet from this moment onward, there is a way forward, a way that leads to freedom, to resurrection, to the promised land.

And now, again, Imagine: You are standing in a stony church, an ancient building erected in past centuries by people long dead. Before you, you see empty pews, dusty furnishings, unlit candles, unopened books. All around you, you can only feel the crushing pressure of the past, of your own inadequacy to

live as God's representative in such a trying time. Behind you, you hear the roar of the street, the rush of traffic as the cars speed past, the chatter of pedestrians as they cluster at the corner waiting for the light to change, oblivious to the building in which you stand, while under it all you can hear the low rumble of the construction trucks, putting up more condominiums and coffee shops, knowing that the day comes nearer and nearer that these, your enemies, will come for you. Before you, behind you, all around you, there is only chaos, only fear, only death. There is no way out.

And then God speaks. The word of the Lord comes to human beings, and God tells you to stretch out your hands. And as you reach out to share a meal with a stranger, to offer a loaf of bread to the hungry, to pray for a friend in need, to share the peace of Christ with your neighbour, as you hold your tired and failing hands out to bless the people of God, the walls begin to crumble. In the breaking of the bread, in the movement of the Spirit, in the sharing of the word among the body of Jesus Christ, a path through the darkness appears before the people. It is not an easy road; it will lead through crisis and fear, through challenge and loss. It will require letting go of things that were once essential, journeying into the wilderness to stand with the poor and the oppressed, the least of our brothers and sisters, and yet from this moment onward, there is a way forward, and it is a way that leads to freedom, to resurrection, to the promised land.

And now, again, think of your own life, of the road you are walking today. On that road, there may be obstacles, barriers that seem impossible to get past, enemies who seem impossible to defeat. On that road, there will be moments

where it feels like everywhere you look, before you, behind you, all around you, there is only chaos, fear and death, that there is no way out. And if the road you walk feels that way today, remember: the one who made a way forward through the Sea, the one who made a way forward through death, he is on your side.

Whatever obstacles stand in your way, whatever enemies you may face, Jesus Christ is stronger still. The one who walks with us today, he knows our weakness, knows our fear, knows every step of this journey through death into life because he's walked this road before. The voice of God still speaks to us, speaks words of power and comfort and love: "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you pass through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your saviour. I gave Egypt as a ransom for your freedom, because you are precious to me, you are honoured, and I love you.

Do not be afraid, for I am with you." No matter what obstacles we face, when we follow Jesus Christ, there is always a way forward, there is always a road that leads out of darkness into light, out of danger into safety, out of fear into hope, out of death into life. And that road opens when we reach out our hands – when even in the midst of our trouble and pain, we reach out to bless those around us, to share what we've been given so that God's ways are made known in the world around us. Today, may we set out on the road together that leads to the Promised Land, with our hands outstretched to receive God's blessings and share them with everyone we meet, with every step trusting in the power and love of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.