

## ***Sermon***

### ***Forgiveness from the Heart***

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Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

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Our scripture from Exodus is one of wonder and awe. We have been traveling with the Israelites and Moses for several weeks now and have watched them endure exile, slavery, plagues, frogs, disease, starvation and in some respects an alienation from God both in their choosing and God's at times. Today we close our eyes and we can see Charleton Heston standing with incredible wind blowing his wig, staff held high in his hand as he demands the sea to part as his people run to escape the torture they have endured from the Egyptians. As you recall the scene was total chaos with chariots racing toward them to recapture them, beat them or worse...and within the drama of that scene, the waters return and drown the enemy behind them.

Scientists have studied these scriptures for generations and have not even been able to agree on just which body of water this must have been...some say it was a low tide that allowed them to escape or an unusual drought...but regardless of the scientific explanation, the truth resides in this story, in this moment, in this relationship. The relationship God has with God's people, the relationship that God has with Moses, Moses relationship to the Israelites and their return to God.

When we look at this scene it is clear that this is war. And thankfully, most of us have not had to experience war first hand where we were captives, suffering and removed from our homes. But most of us can certainly relate to being

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Inspired by [Workingpreacher.com](https://www.workingpreacher.com) commentary on Matthew 18:21-35 by John T. Carroll, Professor of New Testament Union Presbyterian Seminary Richmond, VA and commentary on Exodus 14:19-31 by Anna Marsh, Assistant Professor of Old Testament, Luther Seminary, St Paul, MN.

surrounded by total chaos. Chaos behind us, in our past, and an unknown that we run to in our future. You see, the Israelites, even Moses had to embrace something very important or they would not have trusted God – they had to embrace the right now – the present moment. If they lingered in the past, based what they would do on past traumas, past hurts, suffering they had endured, they may not have had the courage to move forward, certainly not to walk through a raging sea led by the loving but very meek Moses. As they ran through the dry land, with screams and noise following behind them, if they had stopped to turn and look, they too may have gotten stuck in the sand and mud like the Egyptians. It was essentially important that they leave that all behind and stay focused 100% on where they were and what they had to do at this moment. What was next was not important, this knowledge was not needed at this time. It would have clouded their ability to do what they needed to do right now.

Are you stuck in your own mud? Are you looking into the past at a past hurt, living too long in anger or resentment, wondering what you could've done differently perhaps? Can you truly believe God and trust in God's plan for you and for your life so much so that you run toward something that you cannot clearly define? It's not easy and though it is not stated, there were likely some who stayed behind and did not survive to their new freedom with God.

It is said that this passage is less about the Israelites and all about God and who God is. God is doing the fighting on our behalf..."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

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turned with difficulty.” And the Egyptians flee fearing God. Then God instructs Moses to release the waters upon the Egyptians. God is with their leader and God has liberated.

Do you believe God continues to inspire leaders to speak God’s truth? If not, why would you think God would not continue to speak through profits and through those who choose to listen?

The final words in our passage today are this: “So the people **feared** the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.” At the service of Rosh Hashanah yesterday with Temple, Rabbi Ellen spoke of the word “fear” and being a God Fearing people – yet the word in Hebrew also translates to the word “Awe”. To be in Awe of God. What if we translate that way – “So the people were in awe of the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.” How does that change how you view that passage? Does it change it? And why do you think the writer felt the need to say, “they believed in his servant Moses”?

Our New Testament passage from Matthew on a topic that challenges me greatly – forgiveness. But it’s not just forgiveness – it is unlimited forgiveness. This is a passage of great mercy – forgiveness of debt and freedom and compassion denied, when the one forgiven harshly punishes another for the crime he was forgiven of. Then there’s the “whistleblower” who reports this injustice to the King. And then reckoning when the master reinstates the debt for the one who was not forgiving.

What this passage clearly is telling us is that forgiveness is not easy. It is difficult to forgive someone especially if they have not asked for forgiveness nor even feel they have done anything wrong to you or anyone else. It seems counterintuitive to offer forgiveness of someone like this. But we know from a lifetime of experience that like the Israelites, if we continually look behind us at the pain, at the trauma, at the chaos – we fail to see what is here in the now and eventually, like the sea, it swallows us up...again and again. Forgiveness is not acceptance. Forgiveness is not an invitation for someone to hurt us over and over. Forgiveness is our choice to release ourselves from the pain, to relinquish the connection we have to a person or an event, and to love ourselves enough that we deserve to allow the sea to swallow up the memory so we can move on free from carrying the heavy burden of the pain or grief that we must let go of.

I will share with you that I have carried around my own yoke of resentment and hurt for many years since my divorce. I have been unable to release that anger entirely and allow myself to be free from it. I'm still returning to that chaos in my mind and heart at times. And there are other days when I can release it...but every now and again I turn my head ever so slightly and return to the pain.

What pulls me closer to forgiveness is when I look upon my own life and see how many times I have been forgiven for my wrongs, for my shortcomings. I have been given second and third chances through the kindness of others and through the grace and mercy of our Lord. I have been given love and marriage with someone new. I have been able to live a beautiful life and I must share my good

fortune with others by, like the servant who had been forgiven, offer my forgiveness to others.

It is incredible what happens when we release anger and resentment from our hearts as Jesus has asked us to. Suddenly our eyes are open to see beauty and wonder – to offer light and love to those we know and those we meet. Awe is everywhere everyday ...all the time. Don't let another day go by that you don't notice that incredible city you live in near one of the most incredible sights anyone can ever lay eyes upon. Don't let another day go by that you miss a beautiful sunrise, or the glow of the moon or the beautiful sound of a child's sweet voice. "So the people were in awe of the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant."

Amen