

Exodus 14:10-31

Pentecost 12, Supplement Series A, August 27, 2017

- Theme: The LORD saves his people through the water
- I. He demonstrates our own inability to escape
 - II. He delivers by his mighty power
 - III. He destroys the enemy completely

INJ The Great American Eclipse passed by on Monday. Did you stop to notice it? We didn't have anything close to totality here, but things were unusual. There was a lot of hype over this natural and predictable phenomenon. God's creation works in amazing ways, doesn't it?

Our lesson is a much more amazing event – not what is explainable and understandable, but a miracle. God showed both his mighty power and his undeserved love at the parting of the Red Sea. This account is the most celebrated revelation of God's grace in the Old Testament. The people walked between walls of water on dry ground and escaped the Egyptian army! Every child of God was to remember God's past saving activity so they would not despair of his mercy in the present. Our God is the same LORD, the One who steps in to save. We recall his deliverance at the Red Sea, as we glorify him who has also saved us through the water of baptism.

Start by picturing yourself in the dilemma of the Israelites. You are in a crowd of perhaps 2 million people, with families and herds and cattle. You left behind everything you know, but you are finally free from a lifetime of miserable slavery. It will be a long journey through harsh wilderness, but you are heading to the Promised Land. Then, suddenly, the armies of Egypt appear on your trail. Pharaoh had changed his mind and would not allow a peaceful departure. Chariots and horsemen stampede toward you, intent on slaying everyone.

Calm people would have surveyed their options. There were none. The multitude had arrived at a place where they were hemmed in. The sea was in front of them. Mountains cut off their path along the water. The most advanced army in the world was bearing down on them. So, what did they do? Moses says they cried out to the LORD.

Not a bad reaction, is it? Until you hear what it is they said. They whined and complained. It is embarrassing because we say the same things. "What have you done to us by bringing us up out of Egypt? Wasn't this what we said to you... 'Leave us alone.' ... It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness!" We might say: What were you thinking? I knew this wouldn't work. I voted against this plan. We would have been better off doing nothing!

Permit me a few observations. The desperate situation made the Israelites realize the danger they faced. The Egyptian army meant death. It was simple as that. There were no options. Sometimes our situation reminds us that sin means death. There are no options. When guilt weighs us down, when consequences pile up, when our choices are all dead ends, then we have to confess that we are in trouble. Sin condemns. We cannot escape.

God presses us further. He doesn't just want us to have a vague impression that sin is bad, but that our own sin is deadly. It offends him. We try to deflect the attention. "It wasn't my fault!" "My idea would have turned out better." But God traps us. There is no escape!

The Israelites made all kinds of excuses, but none of them stopped the Egyptian army. None of the various choices they could have made would change the situation. They could not save themselves from slaughter.

But could God? Isn't that the real question? Could God save them? And would they trust him to do it? Perhaps one reason we make excuses and blame everyone else is that we hope we can still pull out of it on our own. If only we make better choices and get some lucky breaks...

We must repent of our trust in ourselves. We cannot evade sin's curse. "The wages of sin is death." God demands perfection. We cannot give it. Yet, after repenting of our self-reliance, we must face the other hard question: Do we trust God to save us? Do we believe he can and will rescue us – and without any of our help? Do you trust him?

Moses addressed those complaining and desperate people. He urged them to trust the LORD: "Do not be afraid. Stand firm, and see the salvation from the LORD... The LORD will fight for you. You must wait quietly."

When we are frantic in our fear the LORD says to us, "Do not be afraid." Through his representative he announces that we will see salvation from the LORD. "But I am stuck with no way out! How can this work?" Listen to what he says: You must wait quietly. Do nothing to help, but watch what he does. The LORD saves his people through the water.

In the letter to the Hebrews the LORD inspired a definition of faith: "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." The Israelites could not see any possible deliverance. They could only trust the Word of the God who promised to save. Isn't that the best place to be? God used his almighty power to do exactly what he had said.

The first thing the LORD did was to tell his people to get moving. Here they were, trapped by the sea with the best army in the world descending upon them, and God said, "Stop whining and start moving forward!" You see, faith is confidence in the LORD, but it is not laziness or inactivity. Faith shows what it believes by what it does. So if the people

believed God would deliver them, then they should start walking.

Faith is not something that stands still. It walks forward with God's word. Faith cannot remain if it is cut off from that word. Even without visible confirmation, faith trusts what the LORD says. So let's get moving and walk forward with the word of our God. He is our Deliverer, right?

God did amazing things that day by the Red Sea. The cloud of glory that had been leading the people now moved behind them. The LORD stood between the army and the people, giving light to the one side but keeping the Egyptians in the dark. What must that have looked like? Not even one Israelite was in danger, for the LORD protected them.

Even more astounding was that God caused the sea to open up before them. A strong East wind blew and the waters divided so that there was dry ground. There was a wall of water on the left and a wall of water on the right, and safe passage through the middle.

People have long argued about the reality of this account. Some say there was no miracle at all, just a legend that grew out of an unlikely escape. Others look for a natural occurrence to explain the water's movement. Nothing can explain away the words of this lesson. God did a miracle. He made the impossible happen. The waters divided at his command, and there was dry ground in the middle of the sea.

God can do that. He made everything and he tells it what to do. If he wants the water to stand aside, it will. But consider this: as amazing as it is to consider the physical miracle, isn't it shocking to hear that the people walked between those walls of water? They had just been accusing God of not caring about them. Now they stepped forward, trusting his deliverance.

God has not promised that water will part when we approach. We do have his promise that Jesus has forgiven our sin. Death must stand aside because of his resurrection. Satan must flee. Despair must vanish. Guilt is removed. Listen to his promises: nothing can snatch you from his hand. In all things God works for the good of those who love him. I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe him? Then step forward! Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, between towering, dangerous walls, we are on the dry ground of safety in the LORD's Word.

The LORD is not a God of half-way measures. He does not just snatch his people from danger. He destroys the enemy completely. The same God who saves is the one who judges all who reject him. We glorify the LORD who saves his people through the water.

The people of God were walking through the sea on dry ground. The cloud of the LORD's presence separated the Egyptians from the Israelites. At some point the separation ended. The Egyptians saw that their

prey were escaping. They were determined to devour them, so they followed them between the walls of water.

Now that takes guts! It is an example of hard hearted unbelief. God's miraculous presence stands in their way all night, but they still strive to get through. They see an unnatural sight – water piled up on both sides with a dry path through the sea. So what do they do?

It is the same problem we started with today. Will God do what he promised? The Egyptians concluded that he would not, and they marched into the sea. God hindered their progression. The wheels of the chariots turned slowly. It soon became apparent that God would do what he said. The terrified Egyptians finally were forced to confess the truth: "The LORD is fighting for them and against Egypt!"

God made the waters return to their place. All the Israelite people were safe on the other side. All the Egyptian chariots and horsemen and warriors were drowned in the depths of the sea. The debris washed up on the shore and there was no question who won this victory. The LORD had done it completely. No Israelite helped. Not even one Egyptian remained.

God's victory over sin and death is just as complete. Jesus shed his blood to pay for every sin. Not one remains to accuse or terrify. Every ounce of guilt has been paid for. Satan has no power over us, for we are the LORD's people. Death holds no terror, for Jesus rose from the dead. We live with him now by faith and we will live with him forever in heaven.

Our deliverance was accomplished on a cross outside Jerusalem. Jesus cried, "It is finished!" and our salvation was complete. The resurrection on the third day is proof of the victory. We didn't help, but we are delivered. The victory was placed into our heart as the gospel penetrated our sin and gave us new life in the sacrament of Holy Baptism. There God used water connected with his word to give new life.

We live in that new life every day. Here we are, safe on the other side, and the enemy has been defeated! Our sins are forgiven. The gospel is proclaimed. We eagerly march forward under the banner of the word of our God. By faith we walk in the light of the gospel. In faith we glorify the LORD who has saved us through the water.

Our imagination can hardly picture what this great event must have looked like. Millions of people walking between walls of water to safety – it was more spectacular than even a total eclipse! But, think about this: God's deliverance at the Red Sea is no more impressive than that he has declared you his child in the water of baptism. That he has forgiven all your sin in the blood of Christ. Can he do it? Yes, the LORD saves his people through the water. Praise God that he always does what he promises! SDG Amen.