

## Into the Sea: New Creation Exodus 14:19-31

### 1<sup>st</sup> page Israelites in a Quandary

[ppt] Have you ever watched the movie “the Ten Commandments?” If you have seen this movie, I bet the famous Red Sea scene will come to mind when you read today’s passage. In today’s text, the Israelites are in a precarious position. After departing from Egypt, they marched Pi Hahiroth and had set a camp on the shore of the sea as God told them to do. From a tactical point of view, the Israelites had made a bad decision because there was no way to escape if an enemy army attacked them.

Of course, Pharaoh chased the Israelites with Egyptian chariots and their drivers. Now, the Israelites were boxed in between the Red Sea and the most powerful army of that time. What weapons did the Israelites have against the Egyptian army? The Israelites had nothing more than a promise.

In verse 13, “Moses spoke to the people: “Don’t be afraid. Stand firm and watch God do his work of salvation for you today. Take a good look at the Egyptians today for you’re never going to see them again. 14 God will fight the battle for you. And you? You keep your mouths shut!”

If you were one of the Israelites, how would you feel? You could hear the rumbling of the chariot wheels at your back. On the other side, you could see a turbulent sea that blocks your way forward. The battle cry from the Egyptian army is getting closer and the panicked people didn’t know what to do. There was no way to escape. Pharaoh brought a swarm of chariots and soldiers while you have nothing but a promise from God whom you have never met. How would the Israelites feel? Panic, Confusion, fear, despair, hopelessness, not knowing what to do.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> page: We are in a precarious position

I felt similar emotional turmoil after the pandemic hit our society. The church today is in a much more precarious position, facing multiple challenges simultaneously. Along with atheism, American secularism is on the rise while Christianity continues to decline at a rapid pace. According to research done in 2019, twenty-four percent of Americans don’t affiliate with any religion and this number has continued to grow.<sup>1</sup> People who have left their religion say it happened naturally. This means that this trend has become a strong cultural current we are facing today. In addition, “the tribal political identities have taken the traditional space of religion.”<sup>2</sup> We all see the negative result today. As the politics of fear and hatred rules American society, we have become less tolerant toward others and are divided. We don’t want to be caught up in divisive political issues. So most churches are silent on social justice issues such as racism, climate justice, gun violence or the income gap, and thus, we are unable to respond to the deep wounds of our society and reconcile the division. In fact, division of our beloved denomination seems unavoidable. We want to do something for our beloved church and our neighbors but there are few options available because of Covid-19.

Last Sunday, I had a meeting with Zion KUMC music school committee and we tried to discern what we can do for our neighbors. Since the church has some talented musicians, Zion KUMC planned to have a music school for underprivileged children and adults. But in-person gathering is not possible. Having a music concert is not an available option. Visiting homeless

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vox.com/first-person/2019/6/4/18644764/church-religion-atheism-secularism>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

shelters or nursing homes to share music is not possible due to Covid-19. Even if Zion KUMC has some available resources and willingness to share our gifts with our neighbors, finding safe and appropriate ways to reach out our neighbors itself is very challenging. We want to do something but it seems there's no way to move forward. Just as the Israelites were in a quandary, we also cannot go back the past or move to the future in this perplexing situation. Do you know where we should go from here? What should we do for the future of our beloved Asbury UMC?

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Page: God saves the Israelites through Moses small act of obedience**

Even in our desperate situation, God still works for us and turns our despair into hope for a new life. As the Israelites feared the mighty Egyptian army and the chaotic sea that lay ahead of them, God told Moses, "Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground." (14:16) As Moses raised his hands, powerful wind stirred the waters and split them, forming a huge wall of water and making a way toward true liberation from slavery and oppression. When the old slave master and his army pursued the Israelites, God made the waters returned to its place and Pharaoh's army was drown. This is one of the most powerful scenes of God's mighty act of the salvation in the entire Bible. When there was no way for them to go, God made a way for the Israelites and saved them from the oppression of Egypt. I believe this is our hope. Our God still works for the salvation of God's people as well as the whole world. As God delivered the Israelites from slavery, God is still working to heal this broken world.

But God did not work alone. God didn't automatically fix all issues. Rather, God invited Moses to be a part of his great plan. What did God ask Moses to do? God wants Moses to stretch out his hands over the sea. That was all. If you were Moses, how would you react? In a minute, thousands of Egyptian chariots would attack the camp of Israel and a turbulent sea blocked their way forward. And God just wanted you to stretch your his hands over the sea. Considering the magnitude of the challenge, an 80 year old man stretching out his hands seemed like a meaningless gesture. But when Moses stretched out his hands over the sea with faith, he saw God's extraordinary way of salvation through his small act of obedience.

### **4<sup>th</sup> page: God saves us through Moses small act of obedience**

Our God is still working for our salvation and the redemption of our world. Faced with this unprecedented situation, we may feel helpless and hopeless. But our God is still working for the salvation of our broken society. Let us not despair. Let us not lose faith in people and certainly not in God. Trust our God and stretch out your hands for God's work.

In my previous church, Juhee and I had to struggle with the same question we have now. "What can we do for our church and neighbors?" Just like most United Methodist churches, the church had many faithful people of God but it also struggled with declining membership and resources. It seemed that we didn't have enough to do something new so we just wanted to share the gifts we had, which was Juhee's musical talent.

Since the church was in a rural area, we hosted a annual fundraising music concert for our neighbors. We asked our musician friends if they could help us and prepared a concert program. Church members spread news to their friends and delivered flyers to town senior centers, local new papers and libraries. They also prepared refreshment for our guests. At our first concert, about 80 people came and for the second concert, about 130 people visited the church. It was a big community event.

But a music concert is a single event so we wanted to do a more meaningful project so we started a free violin school. Do you know how many students came for the music school? 3... only 3 students joined the violin school. We were a little disappointed but we did what we could do. While 2 students learned and followed Juhee's instruction well, one student, a little girl, struggled a lot. She seemed to forget everything as soon as she learned it. A few months later, we heard from her mother that she had a learning difficulty and it affected her self-esteem. Since she liked playing the violin, Juhee didn't give up and taught her.

We designed our 3rd concert to be a kind of student recital along with professional musicians. On that evening, about 100 people came from near and far. Of course, the entire family of this little girl came to support her. With other students, this little girl played her first music recital. I could see her proud smile after she finished playing. Later her mom told Juhee that it was the first time that the little girl had achieved something by herself and it made her proud of herself. In some sense, the concert was a healing moment for this little girl and her family. God still works through our small hands. God tells us to stretch out our hands.

### **Stretch Out Our hands!**

Even when we obey God's word and stretch out our hands, we may not always witness something extraordinary like the Red Sea experience. But God works through us and all we need to do is discern what God is doing in our church and in our community and stretch out our hands in obedience to God. Our obedient acts do not have to be something huge or difficult to do. Simple acts of compassion and kindness are enough.

I have received a message from Judy Anderson's family. They are still grieving the loss of their beloved mother and grandmother and the care they have received from the women's group has helped them. Stretching out your hands in love can comfort and heal those who are grieving.

2 weeks ago, I participated in an outreach committee meeting. I didn't expect an exciting or dynamic meeting because the church committee meeting normally involves the process of "making a motion, second, aye." It's not very exciting. In that outreach committee meeting, we talked about what the outreach committee is and tried to figure out what we can do for our neighbors in this pandemic situation. During the conversation, I saw your genuine passion and compassion for our neighbors and the church. The Pandemic situation has made me a little depressed but I was able to see God's divine light through our beloved Asbury family members.

There is still hope. This hope is not on us but on God. Let us not despair. Let us not lose faith in God. God opened up the sea and made the way of salvation for the Israelites. And the same God will open up the dense fog that won't go away and show us our way forward. By the grace of God, we shall overcome all the challenges we are facing. With faith, stretch out your hands and let us go into the sea and to the promised land. Amen.