

Crossing the Sea **Exodus 14:19-31**

Why the Red Sea?

Today's scripture reading is one of the most dramatic scenes in the Bible. The Israelites were fleeing from Egypt after being enslaved for many years. Pharaoh had changed his mind about letting them go, and has sent his army after them. They could hear the rumbling of the chariot wheels at their back while they could see the turbulent sea that blocked their way forward. The Israelites were trapped between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea and there was no way of escape. They had nothing but a promise from God whom they had never met before! What would the Israelites have felt? Panic, confusion, fear, despair, not knowing what to do.

So, they complained to Moses, "Weren't the cemeteries large enough in Egypt, that you had to take us out here in the wilderness to die? What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt? Back in Egypt didn't we tell you this would happen? Didn't we tell you, 'Leave us alone here in Egypt—we're better off as slaves in Egypt than as corpses in the wilderness.'" In this dire situation, they wanted to return to Egypt, their old life, which might not have been perfect but was better than being killed in the wilderness. Their complaints are understandable, however it was God who led them on this path to the Red Sea.

[ppt] As you can see on the screen, there was a more direct and easy path to the promised land. The coastal route was an ancient highway to the land of the Philistines from Egypt, so, God could have led them to this path but God did not. Of course, the Egyptians had built a series of military fortresses along that way since it was an important highway and thus, the Israelites would have found it impenetrable. However, the alternative route they took was even more dangerous and tactically, the worst choice. We have just read why it was the worst route for escape, but God led them to this path. 'Why did God lead them to this path to the Red Sea?' To be frank, we will never know why God led them to the Red Sea, but we know one thing for sure that the Red Sea became the decisive mark on their exodus journey.

The Red Sea was the point of no return

A renowned rabbi said, that crossing the Red Sea was the point of no return for the Israelites. I believe everyone knows the phrase, "the point of no return." Beyond a certain point there is no turning back. I have learned this from my hiking experience. About 7 years ago, I went on a hiking trip on the Franconia Ridge trail in the White Mountains, with the young adult group of my church. However, the night before the hiking trip, I stayed up late talking with them until dawn, got little sleep, woke up early, and drove for 3 hours and 30 minutes. By the time we started the hike, my body was already tired. On top of that, the greasy breakfast we had that early morning seemed to weigh me down. Shortly after we began the hike, I couldn't catch my breath, and my stomach was queasy, making it impossible for me to continue the climb. I had to give up and return to the campsite. Of course, I didn't like the feeling of defeat, so a month later, I hiked the same trail with the group again. Despite my worries, this time I was able to easily reach the mountain ridge. The only problem was that the hike was much longer than I had thought. It took almost 10 hours to complete. After 8 hours, my legs were hurting, and my shoulders carrying the backpack were starting to ache, but unlike the first hike, there was no turning back because I had already passed the half way point. I had to push myself forward because moving forward was the only option. Beyond a certain point there is no return.

For the Israelites, crossing the Red Sea was the point of no return. Of course, they witnessed miraculous salvation by God at the Red Sea. They saw how the mighty arms of the Lord parted the Red Sea and they crossed the dry land while the entire Egypt army was drowned in the sea. This miracle was deeply engraved in their minds but at the same time, once they had crossed the sea, they knew there was no way back and no possibility of fear-driven escape. To be sure, they still complained about water and food, but they looked only forwards and eventually reached to the promised land under God's guidance. Throughout their time in the wilderness, God gradually shaped them to be God's people and good warriors able to fight and win.

Crossing the Red Sea!

I believe that we also need to cross our own Red Sea. Sometimes, I feel that the current situation we are in is similar to the situation of the Israelites, sandwiched between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea. We know

that the church is declining and our time is running out, but we also don't know what to do. We don't know how to bring people back to church. We don't know how to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with our friends and family because talking about religion is taboo! What should we do in this situation? With faith and courage, we cross the Red Sea.

Crossing our own Red Sea means undertaking challenges we face today. Instead of looking back and longing for the familiar old life we once knew, with courage and faith, we face and undertake the challenge of our time. A few decades ago, Christianity was the most prevalent religion in the United States. In the 1950s, 90% of the adult population identified as Christian. Sunday school was full and the sanctuary was full. That was good old time. But we cannot go back to that time and we have to accept that. We are now living in a Post-Christendom society. The church and Christianity have lost their influence on the society and people. Attending church no longer makes sense to many people, even Christians. Sports and family activities have become more important than gathering at the church. People often claim that "I am spiritual but not religious!" In this challenging situation, we often miss the old days. But there is no way to go back to the good old good days! Soren Kierkegaard said, "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards." Instead of looking backward, we must move forward, undertake challenges and cross the Red Sea ahead of us.

How can we cross the Red Sea? With faith and courage, we follow the lead of God and step into the Red Sea. Have you ever seen the movie "Exodus: Gods and kings?" Unlike the old movie, "the Ten Commandments," this movie does not describe parting the Red Sea as a supernatural phenomenon. Facing the Red Sea, Moses prayed to God but nothing happened. In his despair and disappointment, Moses threw his sword into the Red Sea. However, by the dawn, Moses discovered that the handle of his sword surfaced above the water. He saw that the water level in the sea had lowered enough for them to cross, so he raised and gathered the people and ordered them to cross the Red Sea. The Red Sea had not completely parted and dried up yet. Nevertheless, Moses, with faith, ventured into the sea, where the water reached up to his waist. It may have seemed less dramatic, but for me this Red Sea scene from 'Exodus' feels more relatable.

Crossing the Red Sea does not mean that all challenges and problems we face have already been solved. Rather it means that with faith and courage, we face the challenges and do whatever we can and thus, enter into the Red Sea. What can we do? Asbury leadership pray and work together to find our way forward and plan for our future. I ask you to join praying for the church. When we face challenges and difficulties in our own lives, just like when crossing the Red Sea, we may feel fear. Will this work out? What if the plan fails? There might be a fear of failure. With faith and prayer, let us continue moving forward.

No Turning Back!

In fact, we have already crossed the big Red Sea when we decided to follow Jesus Christ as our Lord. When we confess Jesus as our Lord, it means that we give our ultimate loyalty to Christ alone and accept a radical commitment to his teaching of loving God and neighbors with our whole being. Can you turn back from your faith? Maybe not. I believe you know the hymn, "I have decided to follow Jesus; I have decided to follow Jesus; I have decided to follow Jesus; No turning back, no turning back." Can we sing it together? We have decided to follow Jesus. There is no turning back! Maybe we have already crossed the Red Sea and now there is no way back. There is only a way forward. So, with faith and courage, let us continue to move forward. Amen.