

"AT THE SHORE OF THE RED SEA"

A Sermon By

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INTRODUCTION

An eight year old boy was asked by his mother what he had learned at Sunday School. "Well" he said, "Our teacher told us all about Moses. She told us how God sent Moses behind enemy lines to rescue the Israelites from the Egyptians. And then when he got them to the shore of the Red Sea, Moses called for his engineers to build a long pontoon bridge. And after they had all crossed this bridge, they looked back and saw the Egyptians sending tanks. Moses proceeded to radio headquarters on his walkie-talkie to send bombers to blow up the bridge and save the Israelites."

"Now, Bobby" exclaimed his mother, "Is that really the way your Sunday School teacher told the story?" "Not exactly, mom" admitted Bobby. "But, mom, if I told it her way, you'd never believe it!" We smile at the story. It serves to remind us that sometimes, we too fail to believe...to believe what faith and courage can do, and what a man deeply infused with a great faith in God can accomplish in this life.

STORY BEGINS IN EGYPT

The story upon which today's sermon is based begins in Egypt. The Israelites had been in Egypt for a long time. You'll recall that originally they had gone "down to Egypt" to get food because there was a great famine in their own land.

They went there out of their own free will, but they stayed on against their will. They were a minority group and found it difficult to compete with the Egyptians. The Egyptians saw this and thus began to exploit them. Gradually, they were fenced in - repressed and enslaved. The situation was intolerable and interminable. There appeared to be no way out. There was no chance of fighting the Egyptians and gaining their independence. They had gone to get food and they had gotten more than they had bargained for.

We pause at this point in the narrative to reflect upon the fact that all of us are familiar with Egypt. Figuratively speaking, all of us have been in Egypt at one time or another in our lives. We may not have been slaves in the literal sense, but we know what it is like to be a slave in the figurative sense - to be caught in a situation...trapped...locked in...to be the slave to a habit, or to be the victim of circumstance which we can neither control or change.

We think of a man caught in the clutches of a job to which he is not by nature, by training, by temperament, by talent primarily suited, and yet - because of the circumstances involved, he can see no other way out but to stay with it. Or, take another person caught up in the emotional entanglements of a domestic situation which grows tighter and more tense with each passing day, and from which he or she sees no way of extricating himself or herself. Or, still another person - a slave to a habit - drink, perhaps. Friends, colleagues, members of the family watch quietly as the habit enslaves the person. The person lives from drink to drink to drink. In spite of all of his efforts to overcome it, he simply cannot do it. Figuratively, he is living in Egypt - a slave in a foreign land.

Most of us are familiar with Egypt - with situations and circumstances that are difficult to change or control. That's how it was with the Israelites. Slaves in Egypt - and there appeared to be no way out.

STORY MOVES TO THE RED SEA

The story now moves to the shores of the Red Sea. The tide finally turned. It always

does. Remember that.

The tide finally turned in favor of the Israelites. In the course of time - quite unexpectedly and without warning - a man appeared to take command of the situation. His name was Moses. He rose head and shoulders above his contemporaries. From the very beginning, Moses appeared to be a man destined for great things. He was a man with great gifts of leadership. He was not satisfied with submission and a life of slavery. His vision was broad; his horizons large.

Moses, in spite of the fact that he had very little to encourage him, set about to rally his people together and to stir in them the desire to do something about their situation. He was convinced that while the situation was intolerable, it was not interminable. He believed that something could be done. He began along the line of common sense and reason - a good place always to begin...to tackle a difficult situation. Common sense. Reason. Don't ever overlook them.

He pleaded with Pharaoh to let his people go, but Pharaoh refused time and again to grant them permission. Even plague and pestilence did not cause him to change his mind. Finally Moses decided to do a rather daring thing. He encouraged his people to break loose even though the Pharaoh had not given them permission. He gathered them together and led them out of the towns and the cities of Egypt toward the East in the direction from which they had come. At night fall, they gathered on the shore of the Red Sea. There they were - at last - on the threshold on freedom, on the brink of liberty, on the verge of new life.

But as the shadows of the night descended, they heard the rumble of the chariots of Pharaoh thundering down on them. Before them were the waters of the Red Sea. Their hearts failed and they turned on Moses and cried out in a bitter and stinging tone:

"Because there were no graves in Egypt hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians for it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than die in the wilderness."

In other words, they would rather accommodate themselves to the circumstances of slavery than risk the dangers that accompanied the possibilities of freedom.

Pharaoh had everything on his side except God, and Moses had nothing on his side - except God. And God, believe it or not, has a way of winning through eventually. Moses, in response to the cries of his people, spoke words that we ought never to forget,

"Fear not. Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord"

What faith! What leadership. Our hearts are stirred as we see this man in action. His only thought was to reassure his people. In spite of the moment of discouragement, he was not discouraged. In spite of the uncertainties tied in to the future, and the peril involved in crossing the Red Sea, he was ready and determined to press forward. There he stood, massive and mighty, saying, "Fear Not".

REFLECT ON THAT SCENE

Let's reflect on that scene for a moment or two. Isn't it true that so often we get as far as the shores of the Red Sea and then begin to panic. We make that initial effort to get out of whatever it is that may be holding us back or enslaving us. We rally our forces and move out as far as the shore line, but then we're apt to get frightened. Our hearts begin to quiver as we consider all of the uncertainties before us. The possibilities of a new life are there before us, also uncertainty and perhaps elements of risk and of danger. Behind us slavery and security and a relatively safe way of life. So often we end up turning back and taking the safe and secure way. What we're talking about here can be related not only to our personal lives, but also to the social and political affairs of our world.

Someone has pointed out to us that we live in what may be called an "exodus time". It's a time in which we remember where we have been and wonder where we're going. We're in something of a wilderness time - a time of risk and uncertainty. I should like to believe that we are standing on the brink of a new life, a new era. Granted - dangers and discouragement are all around us, but it is my faith that somehow mankind will cross the Red Sea to a better life for all of God's many children.

In one of the most critical days in office - if not the most critical one of all - we are told that Lincoln wrote this line,

"Whatever He designs, He will do for me. 'Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord' - is my test just now..."

CONCLUSION

Friends, something of that same spirit should take hold of us and rule our hearts. What a text to commend. For if you are standing on the shore of the Red, that is if you have gotten that far and your heart is now faint and you're about to lose courage and reluctant to go forward with your undertaking - whatever it may be - because of inner doubts and gnawing fears - then seize upon that text here today and make it your own.

"Fear not. Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord."

If you've managed to make it this far, I believe that the good Lord will see to it that somehow you get across the rest of the way. The Israelites miraculously got across to the other side of the Red Sea. The miracle wasn't God doing something for them that they could do for themselves, but God doing something in them and through them...with every one doing his or her best. And their religion really began at that point. The event revealed to those ancient Jews the God who is the master of all events, the God who can do mighty works, the God who had great plans for them.

And they went from that point with a profound religious experience which, regardless of what might happen to them in the future, nothing could shatter, shake, contradict or deny - from that day down to this!

Let me close with some lines which sum up all that I have brought to you in this brief message. I don't know who wrote them or where I first came across them, but whenever I find myself at the shore of the Red Sea...wondering, waiting, uncertain and unsure...they come to me and give me strength to keep going, believing and hoping always for the best.

"Have you come to the Red Sea place in your life,
Where - in spite of all you can do,
There is no way out, there is no way back, there is no
other way but through?

Then look to the Lord with a faith serene,
Till the night of your fears has gone,
He will send the wind, He will heap the floods,
When He says to your soul, 'Go On'".

PRAYER

We thank you, Lord, for this ancient story of deliverance and
emancipation.

When we become trapped in the entanglements of life that threaten to
undo us, that threaten our very existence, help us to remember what happened
at the shores of the Red Sea, when You didst rule and make Yourself known to
those who believed in You....that day when the waters were turned back and
men walked on dry land in the midst of the sea.

And now may that spirit of strong faith that was in Your servant Moses
be in each of us as we now prepare to go back in to the world from whence we hve
come apart this day, remembering Jesus who said, "I am the Way, the Truth and
the Life". In His name and spirit we pray. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, July 10, 1988

I. GREETING / VISITORS

- A. We take this moment to greet the visitors...delighted to have you worshipping with us...and we hope that we shall have the opportunity to greet you...
- B. Please, be free in the sharing of your name. Take a moment to fill out...or to sign one of the Guest Books...join us on other Sundays. Share in fellowship with us...work with us in the programs of service.
- C. You worship in a Church whose roots are deep...a church that in recent weeks has celebrated its 151st "birthday". We minister in the name of Christ and it is in His loving spirit...

II. PARISH CONCERNS.

- A. Be sure to pick up a copy of our monthly news sheet...copies are by the door in the narthex as well as on the table...
- B. The "Hounds of Heaven" are taking a summer break during July and August. The Aldersgate Class will continue to meet on Wednesdays at 7:30 in Fellowship Hall...proving to be popular and helpful...for those of you who are away on weekends as well as for those of you who need a spiritual "lift" half way through the week.

III. TODAY'S MUSIC

- A. How blessed we are to have the five Demasio children sharing in the service today...providing us with music. You'll note from the bulletin their names and the instruments they are playing...
- B. I remember them from when they were much younger...infants and small boys and how wonderful it is to see them growing up into such fine young adults. Their mother, Dorcas, ought to get "mother of the year" award for her work in raising them.
- C. I could tell you stories about each of them...but won't do that right now...other than to say that one night a year ago Nunyo, Bubu and Nana and I went to Yankee Stadium to see a night game together....and coming out of Yankee Stadium that night around eleven o'clock, I felt very safe and secure with them around me.
- D. I asked them about their music for this morning...and they said that....

IV. WITH US TODAY

- A. How grand it is to have Elody Hoelscher with us this morning...Eldoy now makes her home in Florida, Sarasota area...comes back from time to time to see her friends here in the city.
- B. Elody held many of our "key" positions when she was here...chairing the PPR Committee, and serving as President of the Board of Trustees with distinction from 6 yezs...
- C. It's good to have you with us today.

V. OFFERING:

More blessed to give than it is to receive.