

It's so good to have you here in worship this morning. It's so good you that you're here on, truly one of the "can't miss" Sundays in this grand story of God's plan of salvation.

You see, today in the story of the Exodus God is painting a picture, God is paving the road, toward what Jesus is ultimately going to do on the cross.

God is showing us that what happened to the Israelites through the Exodus, what he did through Moses, he will do through Jesus in us. The Exodus will become our story.

Because what God calls Moses to do, is the same thing God calls you to and the same thing he calls me to. God has called us to go out into the world to share the idea, and not just the idea but the reality, that we are free, that the enemy has been defeated no matter what circumstances we face.

Because there are times in our lives, when we feel just as enslaved as the Israelites. Maybe life has thrown a situation at you recently, and you feel like you are stuck. Maybe it was something that came on slowly, something you didn't even notice at first.

Like the Israelites in Egypt. They moved there to avoid a famine.  
And life was good.  
God provided for them.

But then they began to get comfortable with the ways of Egypt.  
And they began to prosper and they grew very numerous.

They worked for the Egyptians, and they were doing okay until a new Pharaoh, a new king came to power. And since generations had passed the memory of Joseph had faded.

In the eyes of this new Pharaoh, Joseph meant nothing.  
And he felt threatened by their large numbers, and worried that they might join his enemies.

So, this situation for the Israelites, came on slowly.  
The shackles from their Egyptian slave masters didn't happen overnight.

Maybe it was like in Nazi Germany, when the Jews lost their freedoms little by little because fellow citizens looked the other way.  
As the saying goes, "all it takes for evil to triumph, is for good people to stand around and do nothing." Enslavement can happen that way.

Jesus said this about the power of evil:

“The Devil is a liar... and the father of lies.”

“The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy... But I have come that you might have life.”

Well, in this story, the new Pharaoh, certainly began to personify evil. He put slave masters over the Israelites. He made their lives bitter with harsh labor, and he worked them ruthlessly. And to make matters worse the Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: “Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile.”

Imagine the suffering of those moms and dads.  
Imagine the heart rending grief.

Maybe you identify with the suffering in this story.  
Maybe you have suffered at the hands of a new “Pharaoh”  
...someone who seems to have no compassion.  
...someone who makes your life bitter with harsh demands.

Or maybe the Pharaoh that enslaves you is an addiction, or a habit that has way too much power in your life.

Maybe you have suffered a tremendous loss  
or a heart-rending loneliness, or a grief that has never healed.

And maybe like the Israelites you have cried out asking God to hear your prayer.  
a prayer for freedom from enslavement,  
a prayer for healing.

The Israelites prayed year after year and nothing seemed to change. No hope was in sight.  
And when we cry out to God like that, and years go by,  
we also can begin to wonder if God hears our prayers.

And we wonder if God is God, and God has power, then why does it seem like God is absent?  
Why does it seem like God doesn't care?

Maybe you have even been tempted to stop praying, or the words to pray just aren't coming.

In this case, though, the Israelites continued to cry out to God.  
And their lament was a faithful prayer.

Let me say that again. Their lament was a faithful prayer.

Sometimes, we forget that.  
We forget that God hears our prayers of grief, just as surely as He hears our prayers of thanksgiving. There are 150 Psalms in the Bible, and we usually think of Psalms of Praise.

But did you know that over one third of these Psalms are Psalms of lament, prayers where God's people are crying out and asking "How long O Lord, will we continue to suffer?" "Where are you Lord?" "Hear my prayer, and answer me."

Well, years passed, and the Israelites did not stop praying.

And then we read in Exodus 2, verse 23 and 24

The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.

And so God began to work his plan through Moses.

First, saving baby Moses at the river Nile from the Egyptians.

Then later, Moses had grown up, but as a young man he fled from Egypt, in fear for his life, because he had seen an Egyptian beating a fellow Hebrew, and killed the man.

But God had not given up on Moses, and he had a plan to redeem his life

And while he was away in Midian, tending flocks for his father-in-law, Jethro, God called out to Moses from the burning bush.

And he said to Moses:

"I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. <sup>8</sup> So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

And God said, "I will be with you..."

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Now you would think that after hearing God speak so directly, and knowing that God was with him, that Moses would have answered the call right away.

But instead, he was fearful, and he was afraid that he did not have the gift of speaking well... and so he asked God to send someone else.

That's just like us, isn't it? God calls us to go. God calls us to speak words of encouragement and hope to our friends and to our neighbors, to anyone who is fearful and feels enslaved by Pharaoh's of this world, anyone who is lacking the freedom of living in Christ.

And yet, we are often afraid, aren't we?  
And we doubt whether we can speak well enough, or say the right things.

That's when we need to remember what God told Moses:  
"I will be with you."

We are not alone. We are never just speaking our own words.  
God has promised to live in our hearts through faith.  
And Jesus said, "Faith can move mountains."

Isn't it amazing what God can do, when we do even the smallest thing, in faith,  
trusting that God is at work?

I've had times in my life when something seemed impossible, when I felt completely defeated.  
And yet, I heard God whispering to me, to not give up hope...to have faith  
and to trust that God was hearing my prayers, and would act.

Maybe you've had a similar experience?

I heard a pastor once spell out the word FREE..  
and each letter, had a special phrase to go with it.

I think this is worth sharing with you this morning.

F stood for Find out what is enslaving you.

If something is holding you back from answering God's call... whether it's fear,  
or an addiction, or some other Pharaoh in your life, find out what is enslaving  
you.

R stood for Realize that it is God who can set you free.

So if you are bound up and you feel like nothing will ever change, and maybe  
you've started to despair, realize that it is God who can set you free.

E stood for Experience God's love and forgiveness

So you realize that God sets you free, and then just open your hands and  
experience God's love and forgiveness.

and the last E stood for Expect that God has already won the battle.

That's where that seed of faith comes from. You know, not only that God is  
with you, but Jesus has already won that battle.

When Pharaoh, in his pride, tried to resist God, God was patient, and again and again tried to get his attention. But, each time he refused to repent.

And sometimes our hearts are like that, our hearts are hardened in our own sinful ways. Like Adam and Eve, we think we know best, and we try to take the place of God. We want control. We want to keep God at arm's length.

So, God in his patience, time and time again shows us what is enslaving us. And time and time again, God shows us that Jesus alone can set us free.

Finally, it took a new Passover, it took the sacrifice of the "Lamb of God"  
When John the Baptism saw Jesus coming toward him he said,  
"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!  
Jesus, is the one who, once and for all interceded for us:  
and proclaims to the Pharaoh's in our lives: "Let my people go!"

For the people of Israel,  
the Exodus became the defining event of their identity.

The crossing the Red Sea and coming out of Egypt was a defining moment.  
And the Passover, to this day, is a sign of God's covenant faithfulness.

And so this morning when we take the bread and the wine,  
I want you to remember the reality of God's covenant faithfulness coming to us in Jesus' body  
and His blood.

And he sets us free, through the new Passover, through Jesus, the Lamb of God. Amen.