

September 4, 2022 Text: Exodus 1:1-2:10 “A Reversal of Fortune”

A lot of images come to mind from my childhood Sunday School books. There is Joseph whose brothers are jealous of him and the beautiful robe his father has given him (Genesis 37:3-4). The brothers decide to kill Joseph, but one of them suggests they make a bit of money from the deal, so they sell him to some passers-by (Genesis 38:28). The buyers take Joseph to Egypt where he has all kinds of experiences and works his way into the Pharaoh’s favor (Genesis 41:39). Famine breaks out in Joseph’s home country and his brothers come to Egypt looking for help (Genesis 42:3). Although the brothers do not recognize the grown-up Joseph (now in charge of Pharaoh’s affairs), he reveals himself to them (Genesis 45:4). Joseph’s entire family—sixty-six men and their wives—move to Egypt (Genesis 46:26). They should live happily ever after, right?

Now comes our focal text: Exodus 1:1-2:10. Joseph’s family has continued to multiply and soon their very presence is seen as a threat to the native Egyptians. The powerful authorities make slaves out of the Israelites and if that was not enough the king says that all newborn Israelite boys are to be killed (Exodus 1:22). Then comes the heart-stirring story of the birth of Moses (Exodus 2:2). The baby Moses is saved by the Pharaoh’s daughter (Exodus 2:5-6). Whew! All of that and the story is not yet over!

Throughout this unfolding account, individuals are given freedom. They do not always make good choices with that freedom. Joseph’s

September 11, 2022 Text: Exodus 15:1-18 “Rescued from Death to Live in God’s Household”

On the day I write this, I worshiped at a service where we sang two hymns I did not know and another hymn important to me because we sang it at my wife’s funeral ten years ago. People of the faith turn to singing when community, growth, memory, joy, sorrow, learning all come together to seek and find expression. Today’s text from Exodus 15:1-18 is such an example.

Most of the opening verses of this hymn/poem retell the story of God’s delivering the people of Israel across the Red Sea to escape toward the Promised Land (Exodus 14). The viciousness of these verses underlines the dramatic energy it took to overcome the evil of slavery in Egypt.

In verse 10, the hymn speaks of God’s wind covering up the enemy. The faithful have often turned to “Wind” as a way of describing how God’s will blows where it will and how God’s purposes move in multiple places. John 3:8 uses that image to describe the Holy Spirit.

Note verse 13 in which God is referred to as a redeemer. That word (“redeemer”) was the term used to identify someone who purchased the freedom of a relative who had become a slave. Jesus Christ has purchased our freedom! Jesus Christ is our redeemer!

After re-telling the story of the escape from Egypt and the delivery into the Promised Land, the hymn closes with a powerful testimony to the everlasting victory of God: “The Lord will reign forever and ever.”

September 18, 2022 Text: Exodus 17:1-16 “Water from a Rock”

After reading this text from Exodus 17, several thoughts came to mind. First of all, if God calls me to do something totally different, how likely am I to try it (vv. 5-6)? Then, if I do decide to attempt some unusual thing God tells me to do, how likely am I to encourage others to watch with me (v. 6)? (Hardly likely! No one wants to look like a fool with others watching!) How willing am I to accept help offered by others (v. 12)? If I do actually get something accomplished, am I willing to tell others what God has done (v. 14)? How would I feel if God kept others from remembering the wonderful thing I had done (v. 14)?

So, as you see, I don’t end up feeling too good about myself after reading these verses! (How about you?) But, let’s not miss the key thrust of this focal text: God meets the needs of God’s people. And note this: God does it through the hands of God’s people. Moses (v. 6) and Joshua (v. 13) are instruments in the hands of God.

Another thing comes to mind: What would be a good name for the circumstances of my life? In verse 7, there is a record that Moses called the place where all this took place “Massah and Meribah.” Those words mean “test” and “quarrel.” The people had been testing the Lord and quarreling about having no water. If Moses were to give a name to my life journey, what words would he choose? Words like Disappointment, Sadness, Loss? How about words like Victory, Hope,

father was free to do as he wished and he gave special favors to one son and not the others. (Bad choice.) The brothers are free to relate to Joseph; they sell him. (Better than killing him.) Joseph is offered sex by his master’s wife; he declines. (Good choice.) He is free to deny his brothers; he accepts them. (Good choice.) Pharaoh was free to kill Hebrew boy babies. (Bad choice.) Pharaoh’s daughter was free to rescue Moses. (Good choice.)

We cherish freedom, but we do not always do well with it. Through no fault of their own, the Israelites are put into slavery. Their freedom is taken away. Life’s journey sometimes puts upon us burdens we would not choose. What a risky thing for God to give human beings freedom! Present decisions can shape today and the tomorrows. But do you want to give up your free will? Where is freedom missing in your life?

What Someone Else Has Said:

Walter Klaiber and Manfred Marquardt (*Living Grace*, Abingdon) write: “...free will (that is, a will that has been freed by God’s grace!”)

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Open my heart to Your love so my freedom may be used lovingly...”

In today’s faith talk, we might say, “I looked and the tomb is still empty!”

Do you see how easily we move from this Old Testament poem to New Testament accounts and then on to today’s faith experience? It must be true: God is still alive and well! The freeing power of God is working in 2022. (And I write that in confidence while it is still 2021!)

Notice that in Exodus 15 what follows this “song of Moses” is a kind of refrain when the women, led by Miriam, continue the song. What is your heart singing today? What story of God’s work do you enjoy telling? What echoes of God’s saving power do you hear even now?

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Exodus* (Westminster), H. L. Ellison points out: “The outburst of thanksgiving is only natural, but we are apt to overlook the suffering our deliverance may have caused to others. It was true spiritual insight that caused Rabbi Johanan to say, ‘When the Egyptians were drowning in the Red Sea, the angels in heaven were about to break into songs of jubilation. But the Holy One silenced them with the words, “My creatures are perishing, and you are ready to sing.”’

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Thank You, rescuing God...”

Joy? What words describe your experience with God?

Here is a pop quiz. Who are James, Tanielu, and Parker? What do they have in common? (Time’s up! How did you do on this pop quiz?) These three fellows are brothers. I know them and benefit from my friendship with them. My guess is that 99.8% of the readers of this commentary did not pass the quiz. That’s because you and I know different people. We live in different places. We have different opportunities. All of this to say that we may not be expected to hit a rock with a stick (as Moses did) and we may not be expected to struggle with Amalek (as Joshua did), but for each of us, our settings and our relationships provide possibilities for being implements in the hand of God.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Carl Michalson (*The Witness of Radical Faith*, Tidings) wrote: “To consult the Bible is dangerous and fatiguing. We come across passages like ‘love your neighbor,’ ‘love your enemy,’ be ye perfect...’ Any moralist will concede that this is about the finest ethic we find in human history. But who can keep it?...In the Gospel, we have the assurance that God has not asked anything of us that (God) will not see through with us to a successful consummation.”

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Prayer: As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Use me, Lord, even me...”

September 25, 2022 Text: Deuteronomy 30:15-20 “A Paradox: Freedom as Obedience”

The ball is on the two yard line. We are three points behind. There are four seconds left in the game. A field goal would tie the game, but a touchdown would win the game for us. What play should the quarterback call?

I am driving down Roxboro Road and just ahead is that new stoplight. They put it up when a new school was built down Orange Factory Road. I am going 55 miles an hour, eager to get to a lunch appointment. As I approach, the green light turns yellow. Do I keep going or do I hit the brakes?

Four year old Ethan is on the playground. He is enjoying the see saw with his friend Patsy. Seven year old Graham walks over and pushes Patsy off her seat and says, “Okay. I’ll ride now.” Ethan sees Patsy on the ground, crying tears of pain. Then, he sees a rock about the size of a baseball. He picks it up and aims it at Graham. Should he throw it?

Life is filled with all kinds of decisions. Some choices seem to be tinged with legal questions. Some are defined by moral issues. Some decisions are simply for convenience. Some are for pleasure. In today’s lesson, Moses is giving his final speech as leader of the Israelite journey to the Promised Land. He makes it clear to his listeners that

they are given the freedom to choose life as God would give it or death as failure to obey God would mean. Decision. Freedom. Free will.

Even though obedience to God will lead to life (Deuteronomy 30: 16, 19), one can still choose to disobey. Obedience without the freedom to disobey would have no meaning. Words that mean “choose” appear in the Bible over a hundred times, as again and again God puts choice in front of God’s children. If our decisions make no difference, why does God keep asking us to choose?

Jesus struggled with what it meant to obey. Look at Mark 14:32-42 and remember our Lord finally submitting to the cruel death that was to come to Him. Ironically, by allowing death, He chose life.

What Someone Else Has Said:
In *The Crucified God* (Harper and Row), Jürgen Moltmann wrote: “If (humankind) sees and believes in God in the person of Christ, condemned by the law, (humankind) is set free from this desire to have power and domination over others.”

Prayer:
And you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord, You have given me the freedom to choose, and I make this choice:....”

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Download the audio files at nccumc.org/q1_bs22

NC Ranks 10th in Hunger in the Nation

In North Carolina, people in nearly 590,000 households do not have enough food to eat each day. North Carolina has the 10th highest rate of food insecurity in the nation.

When a family is “food insecure,” it means that not every family member has access to healthy and nutritious food choices in order to support an active and healthy lifestyle. When families experience food insecurity, they often must make difficult choices about the quality and amounts of food they are able to provide. Households that are considered to have “very low” food security means they not only lack access to healthy and nutritious food, but that they often skip meals all together.

Not everyone in North Carolina experiences food insecurity equally. Households with children are more likely to have difficulty putting enough nutritious food on the table. Nationally, 15.7 percent of households with children are food insecure, compared to only 10.1 percent of households without children. Additionally, households headed by single mothers are more likely to experience food insecurity compared to households headed by single fathers. Last year, 30.3 percent of families led by single women were food insecure, compared to 19.7 percent of families led by single men. Families where the head of household was white experienced food insecurity at a rate of 8.8 percent, compared to 21.8 and 18 percent for Black and Latinx families, respectively. These disparities point to systemic issues such as the racial and gender-pay gap as well as extremely high child care costs.

Thank you North Carolina Justice Center for permission to reprint.
<https://www.ncjustice.org/publications/btc-brief-nc-ranks-10th-in-hunger-in-the-nation/>

Biblical References - Aug. Sept. Oct. 2022

AUGUST

- August 7, 2022 Text:**
Chronicles 22:6-10, 17-19 “Violence is not God’s First Choice”
- August 14, 2022 Text:**
Matthew 5:9, 38-48 “Building a Fence Around Violence”
- August 21, 2022 Text:**
Ephesians 2:11-22 “Love Your Enemy”
- August 28, 2022 Text:**
Matthew 26:47-56 “Letting Go of Violent Revolution”

SEPTEMBER

- September 4, 2022 Text:**
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- September 11, 2022 Text:**
Exodus 15:1-18 “Rescued from Death to Live in God’s Household”
- September 18, 2022 Text:**
Exodus 17:1-16 “Water from a Rock”
- September 25, 2022 Text:**
Deuteronomy 30:15-20 “A Paradox: Freedom as Obedience”

OCTOBER

- October 2, 2022 Text:**
James 2:14-17, Exodus 22:21-27 “Sharing with the Vulnerable”
- October 9, 2022 Text:**
1 Kings 17:8-24; Luke 21:1-4 “Widow of Zarephath & Widow’s Offering”
- October 16, 2022 Text:**
John 9:1-7, 35-38 “Jesus Sees the Man Born Blind”
- October 23, 2022 Text:**
Luke 18:1-8 “The Parable of the Widow and the Judge”
- October 30, 2022 Text:**

The number of people suffering from food insufficiency in our state, counties, and communities continues to rise daily.

Change happens when we put love into action.

Please consider donating to a local food bank in your area.