

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 17 2023

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“There’s No Turning Back”

Based on Exodus 14:19-31

They were barely past the suburbs and already they were in trouble. After months of planning, ten plagues, a victorious release from the evil Pharaoh, and a mad dash for the border, the Israelites were already in trouble.

- Water in front of them.
- The Egyptian army behind them.

“What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt?” (v11) the people cried out to Moses pointing fingers. “It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!” (v12). How quickly public opinion can change!

It seemed that all of their planning and their victory cries were for nothing. But ...

Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel’s army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the

night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long. (v19-20)

God’s power: His angel, His presence, His signs shifted and moved. A mysterious wall of smoke and cloud and light and dark positioned itself between the Israelite people and the approaching Egyptian army.

- Nothing could penetrate it.
- No one, including the Egyptians dared come close to it.

And through the night the winds blew, and heavenly light lit up the space so the Israelites could move about and prepare their next move while the Egyptians were kept in the dark, both literally and figuratively. They assumed victory was assured once the morning light came; trained soldiers against brick makers, children and sheep. But when morning arrived and the mysterious wall of smoke and cloud lifted, the Israelites were gone, a worn path through the marsh and water the only evidence of their existence. They had escaped!

It would be easy to become distracted by the Charlton Heston moment of the parting of the waters, as only Hollywood can, or to debate the scientific realities of what water can and cannot do given the correct circumstances, or whether it was a sea of water or a sea of reeds, or perhaps a tidal surge like the Bay of Fundy, or a possible tsunami travelling from some distant earthquake, or in fact a miracle from God. So many ideas to become distracted with, that in fact we miss the powerful God-moment of the story: the angel, the smoke, the fire, and the impenetrable wall of God himself protecting His people.

The wall protected God’s people. The wall kept their enemies at bay. The light helped them plan their escape and show them the way. The darkness kept the enemy off guard and confused; its mystery increasing their fears and niggling away at their bravado.

But the wall was also a clear message to the Israelites: “There’s no turning back.”

For as much as we love a good story of Moses and his grand biblical moments through the journey in the wilderness, we have to wrestle with the fact that the Chosen People of God spent considerable time whining, complaining, longing for the past, wishing for a return to a difficult life because at least it was a more predictable life than stepping out into new territory, unsure of where they might lay their head at night.

Standing before the Red Sea, they blamed Moses for leading them into a wild goose chase. As we will see in the coming weeks, a mere few verses after this miraculous parting of the waters, a cry for food and water. When Moses will climb the mountain to receive the Commandments, the people will turn back to the pagan gods of the Egyptians instead of waiting for Moses to bring back the Word of God.

- Trusting Moses does not seem to have been an easy thing for the Israelites.
- Envisioning life in the Promised Land does not seem to have been an easy thing for the Israelites.
- Stepping forward in faith does not seem to have been an easy thing for the Israelites.
- Gentle nudges and signs don't seem to have been good enough to satisfy the Israelites' demands.

Hence, a mysterious impenetrable wall.

A wall that protects, but a wall that also says, "OK folks, you must move forward."

- You cannot stay here beside the sea, or you will die.
- You cannot go back because that life and that time is over. It's done.
- You must move forward.

We'll do it together.

- I'll protect you from the back when enemies approach.
- I'll guide you from the front to show you which way to go.
- I'll light the way, so you don't stray too far from the path and get lost.
- But if you do get lost, you can follow the light back to the way we are going.
- I promise you it will be worth the journey.
- I will settle you in safe place that will be yours forever.

Friends, we are thousands of years away from those moments by the Red Sea, but our hearts still struggle to trust God, see the signs for what they are, and step forward in faith, maybe not knowing where we will land, but knowing that we will land safely with God's hand on our back. As good Christian folk, we say that we believe all these things, but in fact, believer or not, we continue to struggle with these ideas as

they play out in real life, just like the Israelites did.

Our fears, our skepticisms about people, our willingness to believe conspiracy theories more than common sense were all born out of a time of isolation during COVID. And now that COVID is beginning to take another swing at us as the colder fall weather approaches, we must be cautious for our health, but we must be cautious to not let those fears and skepticism swell again.

For us as we struggle to remain faithful and forward thinking...
For our church as we explore what it means to be being relevant in the world today...

Out God says...

I will protect you from the enemies of distain, disbelief and despair.

I will guide you as you move forward to be a new kind of church for a new kind of world.

I will light the path you should take, even if it looks different than the paths we have taken before.

But there is no turning back.

I will not let you go back.

You must move forward.

You must try new things.

I will guide you by day.

I will guide you by night.

But will you trust Me?

Amen.