

September 13th, 2020

Exodus 14:19-31 “A Way Out”

What a week, what a year. Vy Ngyuen, the director of Week of Compassion called me Thursday after he saw a video I posted Wednesday morning reaching out to folks who may be re-experiencing the trauma they felt during the Camp Fire two years ago. He asked, “How are you doing?” Which is funny because I woke up Thursday morning feeling out of sorts because of all the smoke I’d been inhaling over the last 24 hours. My first thought for the morning was, “What is up with this year?” I didn’t think things could get any worse than 2019 or 2018 for that matter. So I took out my phone, went to the “My Photos” app and scrolled back to the last time I felt really good and hopeful about life in general. Turns out that year was 2016.

The year started out well. Katy and I planned some really great Lenten and Easter services. We had a lot of kids in church. The choir was active and sounding great. We had a great Annual Gathering at Arden Christian Church. My parents were doing well. We got a puppy. Katy was ordained as a pastor, and we got to host the service! We had the best year in a long time as far as new members coming into the church. I co-directed my favorite year of CYF Camp in thirty years of outdoor ministry. We put on a great Vacation Bible School. I took a 10 week Sabbatical over the summer where I took my family caving and kayaking. I visited a bunch of churches and read more books over the course of 10 weeks than I typically read in an entire year. I took some of my best photographs. I got my broadcaster’s certificate and started co-hosting a local radio

show. Mary Mitchell persuaded me to come back to the Chico Area Interfaith Council, and I ended up being their Vice President. The Bazaar brought in better-than average earnings. Christmas services were great. 2016 started and ended *very* well. 2017 was a different story. That year started out with the Oroville Dam emergency, and went downhill quickly. At the end of the year though, I said, “Well, there’s always 2018 to look forward to.” That’s when the Camp Fire happened, and because it happened at the end of the year, 2019 started out with *substantial* challenges. Then on the first Tuesday of April, we got 5 inches of rain in 3 hours that flooded most of our church’s rooms, and rendered our office unusable for the next five months. I guess the silver lining in the cloud is that those three years got us good and ready for 2020. And ... here we are. We are physically separated, but we are together here in this space, and *I feel blessed*. Tired, but blessed. And that’s what I told Vy when he asked me how I was. I said, “Tired but blessed.”

We are studying the Book of Exodus, and this morning’s text is the story of the Miracle at the Red Sea. The Hebrew people, after a huge power encounter between God and the Pharaoh of Egypt, were finally freed from 400 years of slavery. But then Pharaoh’s heart hardened one last time, and he sent his armies out to chase down the Children of Israel. Our story today finds the Israelites trapped between the waters of the Red Sea in front of them and the spears of Pharaoh’s army behind them. There was no way to get across the water, and no way to turn back without being captured or killed. Ever been in a place where you felt trapped like that? Maybe you feel that way now. “How are we going to get out of this?” It seems like we’re surrounded by danger every single day. In front of us is an angry sea of

unknown chaos and peril and behind us are forces trying to drag us back into the captivity of our past. Where do we go?

This is one of the foundational stories of our faith because we all have lived or will live this story in some way or another. For the Hebrew people there were only two options that seemed possible: Surrender and return to slavery and endure worse suffering than before, or fight the armies and at least die as martyrs. The odds behind them were overwhelming, but the sea in front of them was impossible to cross. But if the Hebrew people had turned to engage the army either in surrender or in battle, they wouldn't have noticed that God provided an opening through the sea. Here's the lesson of the story – God opens a way through the seas of impossibility. And to top it off, the same sea that saves us will also sweep away and destroy the forces that seek to drag us back and hold us down. The challenge is to be able to wait and trust ... to resist the urge to come up with some half-baked solution of our own and miss the sign of the waters parting in front of us.

Mary and I thought the best thing for us to do today in order to remind us to wait and trust is to have a little bit of a soul alignment. So our favorite chaplain who, thank goodness, specializes in trauma and grief is going to lead us in a time of centering and healing this morning.