

## **Be Still**

**By Rev Todd Farnsworth**

**Exodus 14:5-7, 10-14, 21-22**



*When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, "What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!" 6 So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. 7 He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. 10 As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. 11 They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" 13 Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. 14 The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." 21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, 22 and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.*

There's always a Pharaoh. Ammiright??? Throughout our lives, we've got Pharaoh to contend with.

- When we are children, our parents or caregivers are Pharaoh. Hopefully, the benevolent kind that Joseph got to work with. Someone who recognizes our gifts and nurtures our personalities in a way that is mutually beneficial. We give love and acceptance. Pharaoh gives us a roof over our heads and food. But after Joseph, the Pharaohs were less warm and fuzzy toward Joseph's people. They saw them as burdens. As threats to their sovereignty. And woe unto anyone who crossed Pharaoh's path! When I was a child, I recall the wrath I experienced when I disobeyed the rules or broke the unwritten covenant with my *Pharaohs*. The anger and disappointment of a parent can be pretty terrifying to a child. It can make them want to run away...and some do.
- When we become adolescents or young adults...our peers may be Pharaoh to us. We try to fit in. We try to please them. Making our way in the world can be tricky, and having a group that cheers you on is important. Unfortunately, that same group can stifle our growth if we are too reliant on them. With their fears and need for control, they can hold us captive to old and unhealthy patterns of behavior. They can encourage us to act against our own best interest in order to be accepted...and woe unto anyone who crosses Pharaoh's path! The bullying, social ostracizing, and sometimes physical abuse can be overwhelming to a budding adult. Today Pharaoh even has the tools of social media to gather a greater army around our young people if they dare to act with immunity to Pharaoh's power.
- If we survive those experiences, when we begin to work our boss can be our Pharaoh. They hold our financial security in their hands. They let us know our value, and what we can afford to value. They direct

us toward our position in life and for many people, that position becomes a standard of living. We learn how to dress. We learn what kind of transportation we can utilize. We learn what kinds of foods are available to us depending on how much our employer pays us. And woe unto anyone who crosses Pharoah's path! Our managers can take away our health insurance. They can reduce our hours. They can send us to unnecessary workshops that put a burden on our time with family and friends. There are consequences to defying Pharoah in the workplace. Those consequences can literally mean the difference between begin able to see a doctor or not when we are ill...and so we might cower a bit in our positions. We may take a few more deep breaths and overlook dangerous conditions so that Pharoah keeps us on and some other minion isn't given an opportunity to take our place.

- As we grow older we may experience disease, soured relationships, or finances as Pharoah. An accidental fall. A diagnosis of cancer or dementia. A friend or partner whose behavior becomes controlling. We can feel trapped in a relationship. Our bodies may become a sort of Pharoah that we are afraid of. We confess to not worrying about them, but they remind us with every sideways glance, every heavy sigh, every ache and twinge that they hold our happiness in their cells. And woe to anyone who crosses Pharoah's path! With a loss of resilience, our bodies betray us to Pharoah in the form of painful reminders that they are in control. With time spent at doctor's offices, taking tests, fretting our days away from the joys of family and friends. Worrying that the ultimate Pharoah may be moving into position to swallow us up in Death! And then where would our loved

one's be? Where will we be? There is no escape from Pharoah...so why even try. Best to just live with our overlord and try not to make waves. Go with the flow. Pretend that "it's all good."

There is always Pharoah...and the authors of Exodus got it right, that some of us would rather stay in bondage than risk the unknown deliverance and liberation that God is offering.

*As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. 11 They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"*

Moses was offering the people something, someone, bigger than Pharoah. Moses was leading the people toward a Promised land that wasn't dependent on Pharoah's whims, that was out of Pharoah's control, that was uncharted and dependent on faith. The land Moses was leading the people toward was dependent on trusting God to make a way for them, despite what their eyes could see and their senses experienced. The land Moses was leading the people toward was unknown, except for the sacred assurances of YHWH.

So the people cried and whined and it is clear that they are afraid. They wonder if it might be better to turn around and work with the devil they know rather than the salvation that they don't understand. They plead with Moses:

*What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"*

*Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. 14 The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."*

*The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."*

Those are powerful words. Words that echo across the hills of history into our time, into a world with the Pharaoh's we face.

*The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."*

Sometimes when we are so afraid, so entrenched in Pharaoh's world, it can be difficult to hear or see God's power and presence in our lives. It happens to me. I have heard many of you describe how it happens to you. We say, "I don't know where God is?" "I feel like God has abandoned me." "I'm not sure that God cares about my situation." And we talk and we talk and we talk about how we can't find God; how Pharaoh is going to ruin our lives; how we would be better off succumbing to Pharaoh's demands..." and Moses reminds us, if we can hear him, that if we would just shut up; if we could just stop running, we could see God's action. Maybe that would look like seeking counseling. Maybe that would look like self care. Maybe that would look like breathing quietly (*breathe...*) and waiting for God's direction...

Having quieted the people in his time, Moses raises his arms *over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, 22 and the Israelites went*

*through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.* The Israelites are delivered to a new land, and Pharoah and his armies are left in squalor. They become irrelevant. Dead, actually.

And whether you read this story as physical fact or metaphorical maxim the lives of the Israelites are released into a new chapter. God has made a way and they are free from their captor to explore new relationships with one another and with the Holy who is their champion. And that's a big deal!

Flash forward to Jesus, (you may have been wondering how he fits in on World Communion Sunday) and we see a similar story.

On this day when Christians around the world celebrate this story, we come to the table having been chased all year by Pharoah to do their bidding.

We have been asked to see the Pharaohs of this age as more powerful than God.

We have been mocked and threatened and pushed into spaces that feel like a trap, that feel like there is no escape, that feel like we are better off not escaping; and many of us come to the table that Jesus has set, wondering if we'd be better off in Egypt? Maybe just give in and go along with the madness we see. Believe the lies we've been told. Succumb to the dangers that Pharoah wields if he doesn't get his way.

Much like our spiritual siblings from long ago, there is a LOT at stake for us today. Maybe we can hear ourselves thinking: *"Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"*

**(step to table)**

Jesus invites us to be still.

Jesus raises his hands over the table before us, and with the power of God, breaks the bread, to the right and left.

In the stillness, we are invited to pass between the pieces of his broken body.

In the stillness, we are invited to enter into his forgiveness, compassion, and love.

In the stillness, we are invited to be nurtured in the trough of his Holy presence, with our siblings around the world, the new Jerusalem, as we walk through the path that he has made so that we can be free of our Pharoahs and enter into a Promised land of freedom.

Pharoah won't survive in this passage. He has no power here.

Pharoah's armies hold no sway before our Lord.

In this table of grace, we are led to dry land, free land, and liberation from the ways that bound us in the past. It is uncharted territory, but here, we have a God who will resist Pharoah's advances and give us the manna to thrive.

There's always going to be a Pharoah. Ammiright??? They threaten and bluster and punish and pursue...but our faith gives us a tool for leaving them in the dust.

Be still. Be still. Be still.

Amen.