

“Be Still: Stand Still and See”
Exodus 14:10-22

Many cartoons and movies often show desperate situations by having the hero reach the edge of a cliff where they are being chased by a scary enemy with nowhere to go. The drama of such a moment puts us on the edge of our seats as we wonder what is going to happen next. Let's watch a scene from the movie Frozen about such a moment.

<https://youtu.be/ORP2FK60TEw>

We are left at such moments with no choice. There is apparently no way out. We are left with a sense of despair and yet at the last possible moment, something amazing happens and the hero or heroine end up finding a way and we are relieved for that. This is the drama we are presented with in our Bible story for today. Under the leadership of Moses, the Israelites have found a way out of slavery in Egypt and now they are free, but only to be chased by Pharaoh and his army and at the moment of this story, they were facing a certain death: An army behind them and a body of water in front of them. The symbolism of the story could not be more vivid. For the Israelites, bodies of water represented chaos and fear. They were never seafaring-type people. Their whole journey to freedom looked like a failure at that moment.

As part of the larger context of the whole story, the book of Exodus is about an incredible story of freedom for a people who were oppressed because of greed. It is a story that is about all of us and our search for happiness. The events of the story need to be considered as metaphors for what happens in human history all the time. We can debate the exact location of the Red Sea or whether there was historical evidence of such events taking place literally. But then we would miss the point of this incredible story. The kings of Egypt represented the worst of human greed. Even though Pharaoh had agreed to let the Israelites go, he just could not let go of the economic benefit of slavery to his country. The economy of Egypt, as is the case of all empires, was based on grasping and accumulation of wealth at the expense of those who are exploited in the process. On the other hand, we see God leading the Israelites in a different way of being and living. They were to leave the Egyptian economy and its way of life of grasping, forced labor, and exploitation in order to live a life of compassion, justice and peace. The whole covenant between God and Israel was about this way of living out of a sense of abundance instead of fear and grasping. I love how Moses responds to the people's fears. In verse 14 we hear these words from Moses: “The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.” What? Keep still when there is an army behind you and sea in front of you! That sounds like a tough plan to believe in. But if we take the faith nature of this story, we can see that the lesson of faith here is to turn away from the ways of Pharaoh of grasping and greed in order to live into a new way of being the people of God. This new way is about abundance and trust instead of fear and greed. The contrast could not be sharper or more dramatic in the story. Pharaoh is grasping, while Moses is trusting! And just when the people trust, a new way appears in front of them. Just then they were able to see a way out of no way! A new way of moving

forward was possible for them through standing still and seeing in a deeper way, while Pharaoh and his army are defeated by their own greed and grasping.

As we continue focusing on being still to know God, this week's story reminds us of the importance of standing still in times of trouble so that we may act out of a sense of trust in God and not in the wisdom of the world. Think of the wisdom of our world and how we are advised to grasp and get more for ourselves and the end result is more violence, pain and injustice. There is an invitation and a challenge for us to live by a different kind of wisdom that says that giving is the way to greater abundance and that trusting in the goodness of God is the source of our joy instead of accumulating resources. Wars, exploitation, and violence are still part of our human experience and the economies of the world consistently leave so many people destitute and even enslaved. Modern day slavery numbers are appalling and yet most of us are unaware of these numbers or may feel helpless in the face of such evil. According to a 2017 CNN news article (<https://www.cnn.com/2017/09/19/world/global-slavery-estimates-ilo/index.html>) "More than 40 million people were estimated to be victims of modern slavery in 2016 -- and one in four of those were children. Those are the findings of a new report produced by the International Labor Organization (ILO), a U.N. agency focusing on labor rights, and the Walk Free Foundation, an international NGO working to end modern slavery. The report estimates that last year, 25 million people were in forced labor -- made to work under threat or coercion -- and 15 million people were in forced marriage." This is an extreme result of our world economies. There are also so many people who suffer in our own country and around the world because of the mentality of hoarding and accumulation.

Even as people who have the advantage of benefiting from good paying jobs, many people in the United States live with a sense of financial anxiety that leads us to believe that we never have enough. I recently read *Your Money or Your Life* by Vicki Robin and Joe Dominguez and found many interesting insights in it about our relationship with money. Even though it is written from a financial point of view, it has a lot of wisdom in it about the heart of our relationship to money. Here are three quotes from the book,

"If you live for having it all, what you have is never enough."

"Waste lies not in the number of possessions but in the failure to enjoy them."

"Americans used to be 'citizens.' Now we are 'consumers'."

How might the wisdom the story from Exodus apply to us today? Where can we see God moving us away from grasping and scarcity into new ways of abundance and trust? Where do we see this kind of rescue needed in our world and in our lives? How does being still help us to avoid the ways of grasping? We will take a few minutes to discuss this and then share insights.

I would like to end with a simple story of wisdom presented by teacher who was helping her students to understand the importance of releasing hate. Watch the video in the first service:

<https://www.facebook.com/InspiredLifePage/videos/1682359001886646/>

“A teacher asked her students to bring some tomatoes in a plastic bag to school. Each tomato was to be given the name of a person whom that child hates. So, the number of tomatoes would be equal to the number of persons they hate. On a pre-determined day, the children brought their tomatoes well addressed. Some had two, some had three and some had five, some even had 20 tomatoes in accordance with the number of people they hated. The teacher then told them they had to carry the tomatoes with them everywhere they go for two weeks. As the days passed the children started to complain about the decay and smell of the tomatoes. The students who had many tomatoes complained it was very heavy to carry and the smell was too much.

After a week, the teacher asked the students “How did you feel this week?” The children complained of the awful smell and heavy weight of the tomatoes, especially those who carried several tomatoes. The teacher said, “This is very similar to what you carry in your heart when you don’t like some people. Hatred makes the heart unhealthy and you carry that hatred everywhere. If you can’t bear the smell of spoiled tomatoes for a week, imagine the impact of bitterness on your heart as you carry it daily.”

Life presents us many times when we find ourselves pressed between a rock and a hard place, Pharaoh’s army behind and the sea in front, we always have a choice between striving and grasping or flowing and trusting in God’s care. God longs for us to live in the Promised Land of freedom and love, while the world often lures us to believe that the way of Pharaoh is the only option we have. That is why our contemplative practices are so essential to our transformation and the transformation of the whole world. May you live each day by the wisdom of standing still seeing as God sees. Amen.