

Road to Freedom

September 14 • 2008

God acted to liberate the Hebrew people, and they responded with joyful celebration. They saw God's saving work, and believed. Then, as now, God hears the cries of oppressed people and acts. This God is worthy of trust and loyalty. The gift of such compassion strengthens faith for the lifelong journey toward living in freedom in God's reign.

Focus Scripture

Exodus 14:19–31

Additional Scriptures

Psalms 114 or Exodus

15:1b–11, 20–21

Romans 14:1–12

Matthew 18:21–35

Creator God, we see order come from chaos, and we believe. Redeemer God, we experience your compassion and reconciling love, and we have faith. Sustainer God, we sense your lively presence with us, and we honour you. Praise and glory are yours. Amen.

Focus Scripture: Exodus 14:19–31

Exodus 14 continues the story of the Hebrews' journey to freedom. Following the Passover meal (Exodus 12), the Hebrews fled from their homes, stopping for instruction and consecration of the first-born (Exodus 13). They avoided the main military route between Egypt and Canaan; a daytime cloud and nighttime pillar of fire confirmed God's leading presence. When trapped in their campsite between the sea and the Egyptian army, Pharaoh seized the opportunity to recapture his escaped workforce.

In today's passage, God directs the action, moving the cloud to protect the Hebrews as they camp by the sea. God directs Moses, and moves the sea. God creates "water walls" that provide a dry crossing for the Hebrew slaves. When God restores order to the sea, there are devastating results.

The storyteller shows that God is responsible for the freedom of the Hebrews. God's action frees and saves. The people see and believe. God's actions serve to continue the formation of the people of Israel, who grow in understanding that faith in God is well-placed.

Water is significant in stories of God's saving work. Water recalls God's work in creation. God's promise to Noah was to never again destroy with water. Water also is a physical barrier. Water-crossing imagery is found again in the story of Joshua leading the Israelites into the Promised Land. Crossing through water becomes a metaphor for transformation – a symbol of God's deliverance. Water, as a sign and symbol, is used in baptism today as a means to rehearse God's freeing love through Jesus Christ.

For modern readers, Exodus 14 often raises questions about God's character. Couldn't God have saved the Egyptians, too? Remember that the storyteller who recorded the stories in Exodus was a person of

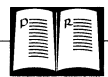
that time and worldview. Pastor Martin Niemoeller, imprisoned in concentration camps during World War II, said, "It took me a long time to learn that God is not the enemy of my enemies. [God] is not even the enemy of [God's] enemies." A Jewish legend tells of God's words to an archangel, who was celebrating the defeat of the Egyptian army in the sea: "Why do you celebrate while the work of my hands is being destroyed?"

The Exodus stories explore God's relationship with the Israelites. They help to shape them into a people with mission and charge. These stories become a lens for understanding later events in their history, and shape their self-awareness, values, and faith. Their understanding of God as I AM ("I will cause to be") becomes clearer. The exodus journey is associated with God's grace, compassion, and salvation, and becomes a metaphor for hope. Two other readings for today – **Psalm 114** and **Exodus 15:1b–11, 20–21** – affirm the importance of God's actions in the lives of the people at this time.

For Jesus, the road to freedom was forgiveness. Jesus' story in **Matthew 18:21–25** lifts up the essence of God's law as God's gracious, extravagant, unlimited compassion. Paul, in **Romans 14: 1–2**, calls Christians to be accountable to Jesus' standards and example of forgiveness, while living with confidence that we are God's. Jesus' disciples today continue to journey toward the freedom of God's reign, striving to live in ways that honour God.

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God continues to save, and we are called to faith in such freedom. What signs of God's freeing and reconciling love have you witnessed? What does it mean to join others in celebrating such liberation?



Replacement biblical background page for **Lutheran, Episcopal, and Anglican congregations** using the **paired reading stream** of the **Revised Common-Lectionary** is on the **Congregational Life Paired Reading CD**.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access *Spirit Sightings* for connections between current events and the focus passage.

