

## Salvation Can Be A Tricky Thing

Exodus 14:21-21

Finally-----did I say finally?-----finally Pharaoh released, set free the Hebrew slaves. "Get out of here. Get out of town. The sooner, the better," he yelled. But then---but then he changed his mind. He was the Pharaoh after all and Pharaohs have a right to change their mind. And so he snapped his royal fingers and the five star general, a General Patton type who was standing beside the throne, jumped to attention and received the orders to bring them back, everyone last one of them. Go get the Hebrews. Do not allow them to escape. I want them back in Egypt by the time the sun dial is at the three quarters mark!

As luck would have it, Egyptian luck that is, the Israelites had made a wrong turn. They should have made a left at the pyramid but they took a right. And we're no going to get into whose fault it was. Let's just say that when the Egyptians caught up to the Israelites the Israelites had made it to the Sea of Reeds or the Red Sea. It doesn't really matter which it was. The bottom line was they had their backs up against the wall. Before them was an obstacle, some water hazard. And behind them were Egyptian chariots doing 75 miles per hour in a 55 zone. They were hauling it.

It didn't look good. No, it didn't look good. And as you would expect, the Hebrews were getting a little antsy, a little nervous, a little beside themselves. Why did you bring us out here to die. Weren't there enough graves back in Egypt? they asked Moses? It was a good question. But Moses had an even better answer. "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance, that salvation that Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still."

O.K.? Right? Keep still. That's all we have to do? Malarkey.

But it was the truth. They didn't believe it, but it was the truth. Moses stretched his huge hands over the sea. [Show them how he did it J.D.] J.D.—uh Moses stretched his huge hands over the sea and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night. It took longer than the movie made it seem, but that's not the point. It happened. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. Dry ground. They didn't even get their little toes wet. But when the Egyptians came through, well that was another story. The wheels of their chariots got clogged and the Egyptians drowned. And the Israelites were saved. Hallelujah. Praise God. Whoopee. Saved. Saved from Pharaoh. Saved by God. Just in time.

Salvation is sweeter than a Clemson watermelon which is sweet to the rind.

Salvation is more wonderful than scratch golf. At least I think it is.

Salvation is----and I know this is true, salvation is life-giving, life-changing, life-creating. But salvation can be a tricky thing. Tricky, tricky, tricky. Someone needed to let you in on that fact, that salvation can be tricky and I thought it might as well be me.

Allow me to explain. Fredrick Buechner asks this question, "Can we be slaves, we who of all people are so much our own masters? And the answer, of course, is that we're slaves precisely because we are our own masters." In other words, salvation can be tricky because what we find out sometimes in the process of being saved is that we have been our own Pharaoh. That's right. It's a stunning revelation, but often we are a Pharaoh who has enslaved ourselves. We are both the Pharaoh and the slave. Sounds hard to do, but by George we do it all the time. We are our own worse enemy. We don't need a dog to kick, shoot, we got ourselves to kick.

I got a call from a non-church member this week, someone who lives out of town, an individual who knows I have been trained as a counselor and was desperate for some help. She is separated from her husband. They have been married for 23 years. He's taken up with another woman. And my friend is trying to figure out what happened. She thought she had the perfect marriage, the perfect home, the perfect life. And now her back is up against the Red Sea and she can see the javelins coming at her from the Egyptian chariots.

As you have already figured out, there are several obvious Pharaohs in this story. Her husband who is fooling around. The woman who is fooling around with her husband. And without getting into all the details, there's my friend's mother and father. A boatload of Pharaohs. But as I listened to the painful details of the saga I thought I was hearing the voice of another Pharaoh and this Pharaoh perhaps was the toughest Pharaoh in the set. I thought I heard the voice of Pharaoh in the voice of my friend as I heard her talk about herself.

Is your voice ever the voice of Pharaoh? Have you put yourself in some sort of bondage?

It's so easy to be mean to yourself. So easy.

One of the ways Ann Lamott helps me is with her stories about how mean she can be to herself. Lamott, speaking figuratively, says she has this radio in her head and stereo speakers and she sometimes tunes into a station and out of the right speaker what she hears is the endless self-aggrandizement, all the commentary regarding her specialness, uniqueness, all the imaginary TV talk-show interviews with Johnny and Joan and Dick Cavett, and then out of the left speaker, comes every late-breaking bad bulletin on what a mess I'm making or am about to make of things, the fear of being uncovered, of impending doom. Lamott writes, "So I'm trying to change channels, out of my head where the station splays and into my heart, and my wish for this year is that I remember to change channels more often."

At one point Lamott realized she had beating up on herself about her parenting skills. She writes, "I'm trying to be extremely gentle and forgiving with myself today, having decided

**that I'm probably just as good a mother as the next repressed, obsessive-compulsive paranoiac.**

**I think we're all pretty crazy on this bus. I'm not sure I know anyone who's got all the dots on his or her dice."**

**Pharaoh. The next time you look in the mirror look to see if the image before you is that of Pharaoh.**

**Frederick Buechner is right. Exodus is always happening. Red Seas are always happening. The wilderness is always happening. And---and if we have eyes to see it so is salvation. Do you really think God is going to get us out of Egypt only to let us die a few miles down the road? Do you believe that? I don't. I believe salvation is around the corner, even we take a wrong turn at Pyramids. And I wanted you to know that. I wanted you to know that salvation is available. Just keep in mind that salvation can be a little tricky.**

**God wants to save you. God desperately wants to save you. Do you want to be saved?**