

If so, I hope someone will say to us, as someone should have said to those Hebrews, “God has brought you away from those Egyptian graves because He wishes you to be buried in better ones in another land.” And we know He will provide us with the water, meat, and bread that will sustain us during our search for that particular hallowed ground, wherever that may be.

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October 3, 2010.

¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxiv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² Exodus 14: 5-14, 19-21, 24-28, 30 (KJV).

³ Hebrews 11: 23-29, 32-40 (KJV).

⁴ Exodus 14: 10b-12 (RSV).

⁵ Exodus 15: 23-26.

⁶ Exodus 16: 2-15.

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Sermon for Morning Prayer The Eighteenth Sunday After Trinity

I. Lessons:¹

A. **The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the fifth Verse of the fourteenth Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, called Exodus.²

“And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us? And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him: And he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand. But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth [*pie-hah-HIGH-roth*], before Baalzephon [*buh-awl-ZEH-fonn*].

“And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.

“And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.

“...

“And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided....

“... And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them.... Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

B. The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-third Verse of the eleventh Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews.³

“... By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a prop-

part-time crossing guard is paid?”, “Our congregation isn’t growing”, “My family is always asking me when I’m going to leave that weird bunch and join a real church”, “Why can’t all these competing church groups just forget their differences and get together?”, and many more of the same ilk.

We have not been on our journey for forty years, as the Israelites were, but many of us have been on it for more than thirty years and we see no end in sight. Over those years, we have been beset with problem after problem, of almost every conceivable sort, but each time one of those problems has threatened to overwhelm us, the Lord has stepped in and provided a solution, usually one we could not have anticipated or envisioned before it became effective.

VI. Conclusion:

I see this three decades’ history of the Lord’s saving us from difficulties – difficulties that all too often were of our own making – as a cause for worry rather than a cause for complacency. I cannot believe that, time after time, the Lord has seen fit to preserve us from the results of our own folly unless He has some very significant purpose that He wishes us to fulfill, yet I see almost no effort being invested in trying to discern what that purpose may be.

We need to be about that process of discernment. Why has the Lord called us onto this difficult journey and where is it that He intends for us to arrive? Perhaps while we are trying to discover that we may be from time to time frustrated by the problems of our search and thus tempted to emulate the ungrateful Israelites, remembering the glories of our past church homes and saying, “‘Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, in bringing us out of Egypt?’”

Immediately after that, the Israelites again began backbiting, complaining that they had no bread to eat and, once again, that they had not suffered this danger when they had languished in captivity in Egypt.⁶ Once again, the Lord provided for their need by sending flocks of quails for meat and the mysterious manna for bread.

And so it went throughout that forty years' journey: the people felt a need; in their self-centeredness and ingratitude, they began complaining that this need was going unmet; the Lord would hear those complaints; and the Lord would overlook that ingratitude and, despite it, would provide for the peoples' needs.

If you are hearing this sermon this morning, you are, like the ancient Hebrews, on a journey through the desert, fleeing captivity and seeking the Lord's promised land. I say that because if you are sitting and hearing this homily, you worship according to the traditional Book of Common Prayer, and if you worship according to that Book, you are a member of a persecuted and oppressed people.

Today, traditional Anglicans are on a journey, fleeing their historic faith's captivity at the hands of the modernists and revisionists, seeking religious freedom of the sort their grandparents enjoyed in better times just as the Israelites sought the same land in which their forebears Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had lived in prosperity.

Our journey, like theirs, is often over rocky ground, is often ill-provided with the comforts of existence, and seems to be taking inordinately long to bring us to the place the Lord has intended for us. Our journey, like theirs, is all too frequently punctuated by murmurs and complaints. True, ours are not about pursuing armies or shortages of water or food; instead, we hear: "We need a building or we won't grow", "Why can't the bishop send us a clergyman who will be available 24/7 and who will work for less than a

er child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment. By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.... And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon [**GHIDD-ee-ahn**], and of Barak [**BEH-rack**], and of Samson, and of Jephthae [**JEFF-thay**]; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

II. Text:

From the First Lesson: “And the people of Israel cried out unto the LORD; And they said to Moses, ‘Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone, and let us serve the Egyptians?’” For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.’”⁴

In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

III. Introduction:

In my youth, I once read the entire Bible straight through, from Genesis to Revelation. Two things stick in my memory from that experience, one of which was a surfeit of “begats”, “omers”, and “ephahs”. I do not recommend that wholesale approach and I myself will never repeat it. A far better plan is to follow the Scriptural readings of our Daily Office lectionary, organized as they are around the themes of the Church year and covering the important doctrinal portions of the Old Testament once a year and those of the New Testament twice a year.

I said that two things stuck in my memory from that experience and it is the second of them that made it a valuable one in a way that a more sensible plan of Bible study might not have been. That second thing was the strong impression of a theme that seemed to permeate the Old Testament.

IV. Theme:

This theme consists of a recurring pattern in which the people with whom God had chosen to deal repeatedly fell

away from the relationship God desired to have with them and instead followed their own impulses and egos. Then, each time their improvidence had run them into inevitable trouble of one sort or another, God had mercy on them, retrieved them from their difficulties, and received them back into fellowship with Him.

And, time after time, these people showed their gratitude for God’s consideration by once again departing from His ways in order to pursue their own, and the dismal cycle would repeat. This cycle recurred, over and over, until God provided the ultimate resolution of the problem of sin by sending to us His own Son incarnate in a human form, which is, of course, the story that the New Testament tells.

V. Development:

The portion of today’s First Lesson that I have selected as my text this morning is only the first of the Israelites’ many mutterings and murmurings during their flight from Egypt and subsequent wanderings in the Sinai and Negev Deserts. This one took place only shortly after the people set out, while Pharaoh’s army was first pursuing them: they upbraided Moses, complaining that they would surely be killed by the oncoming Egyptians and that if they were to die at those Egyptians’ hands, then they could much easier have done so back in Egypt, without the trouble of making a journey first.

This time, the Lord saved the Hebrews from the pursuing army by opening for the fugitives a way across the Sea of Reeds, and leading the Egyptians to follow them only to be drowned by the returning waters. Shortly after, the Israelites began complaining again because the only water they could find was unpalatable;⁵ the Lord again met their need by revealing to Moses how that water might be purified to make it drinkable.