

Held Through the Waters

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. 4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. 5 God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns. 6 The nations are in an uproar; the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice; the earth melts. 7 The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. 8 Come, behold the works of the LORD; see what desolations he has brought on the earth. 9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. 10 "Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth." 11 The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Selah

Exodus 14:10-25

⁹As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. ¹¹They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? ¹²Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone so that we can serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." ¹³But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today, for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. ¹⁴The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still."

¹⁵Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. ¹⁶But you lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them, and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. ¹⁸Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers."

¹⁹The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. ²⁰It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so, the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. ²² The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. ²³ The Egyptians pursued and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. ²⁴ At the morning watch the Lord, in the pillar of fire and cloud, looked down on the Egyptian army and threw the Egyptian army into a panic. ²⁵ He clogged^[a] their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt."

As I shared at the start of our service today, my name is Kassy Heinrich-Wydra. I have been a member of Trinity for more than 2 decades and have had the privilege of serving alongside many of the pastors and staff of this church. This month we're diving into a Sermon Series called "Where God Meets Us" and we've heard some stories of God meeting us from Genesis and Exodus where God's faithfulness has been shown in His promises, in the wilderness and in our weaknesses... and this morning I'm going to speak about God meeting us in the water.

Here's a fun fact for you all: I am not a strong swimmer. Despite growing up in Minnesota, being right down the road from the glorious Lake Minnetonka and having a family cabin, it wasn't until recently that I properly learned how to swim. As a kid I sort of half-floated, half flailed and called it the doggy paddle to keep my head above water and pass whatever safety test was needed for summer camps. I also made sure to stay near the pool edge and keep a flotation device within a few arms lengths to ensure I could stay afloat.

In one of the countless instances of opposites attracting in my marriage, I will note for you all that Rob takes water safety much more seriously than I do or did. He not only knows how to do the right strokes and kicks at the right times, but he even knows the names of the strokes. When our youngest was six months old, she was enrolled in swimming lessons. I never volunteered to take her, but wholeheartedly supported Rob when he had to leave work a few minutes early those Mondays to wrestle Nora into a swim diaper and splash around in heavily chlorinated water for thirty minutes. Despite my skepticism over the whole baby swim lessons, exposing Nora to the water in that first year did indeed turn her into a fish. As she grew up and expressed more and more interest in pools, lakes, oceans and most recently lighthouses, it became clear that I was going to need to increase my skill level. Shortly after having our son, who also loves the water but has shown a preference for boats instead of lighthouses, I signed up for adult swim lessons

at the Maple Grove Community Center. Nora and I had classes at the same time and could wave to each other from across the pool.

It didn't take many classes for my confidence in the pool to grow. I managed to learn the strokes, swim a few laps, and comfortably tread water (okay, floated and flailed) in the deep deep end. As far as I was concerned, I could swim! But then it came time to give diving a shot.

I am not a gifted enough storyteller to do this scene justice, but from the perspective of my swim instructor, classmates, and Rob and Nora who were watching as her class ended, I made a SPLASH when I made my dive. Even with excellent coaching and encouragement I haven't found a way to be graceful when I need to dive in... and as I've reflected on our text and the Israelites at the edge of the Red Sea, I think both my faith life and my swimming skills have more in common than I want to admit.

As I knelt, and eventually stood, at the end of the diving well I could feel the internal panic rising, and I bet the Israelites felt that as they were being chased by the Egyptians in the desert too. The fear and tension of the story is palpable in the text. It's almost like an action movie – well, actually it is. Charlton Heston's portrayal of Moses in this very scene continues to be a landmark in Hollywood history. As I recap the text, let your mind wander a bit into special effects and play this out:

Imagine for a moment. You're tired. You're running. You're being chased across a desert. You've left behind everything you've known – and sure, life in Egypt may not have been a breeze, but it was your life. And you're following some guy named Moses who grew up in the Pharaoh's castle but claims to be an Israelite. He's started a feud with the Pharaoh and now, you're on the run and the Egyptian armies are closing the gap. What might you be feeling or thinking in that moment? And have you ever felt that before?

I can say I have. Right at the edge of that diving well. I got along fine before. I was even pretty sure I could swim to shore if a boat broke down and I had a Styrofoam cooler I could cling too. What good was learning how to swim going to do me? I wasn't going to go swim laps before work anytime soon. I had two young kids. And what does diving have to do with swimming anyways?

Scripture tells us that in this moment, the Israelites were afraid. They cry out to the Lord and ask Moses directly: "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? ¹²Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone so that we can serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."

Let me repeat that again: For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.

Here we see the Israelites overwhelmed with doubt and uncertainty. They want to turn back. Even though they have seen God's faithfulness in imaginable ways – they do not know what is coming next, and they are facing a crisis of faith. They've lost sight of the promise.

Can any of you relate? Has God ever called you to something, to act or to lead, and you've found yourself overwhelmed? Even the good things – starting a new job, buying a house, making a family, retiring...

These moments are good. And often they are lead and orchestrated by God, but sometimes, it can feel like you're being chased into certain destruction, and maybe, just maybe, it would have been better and safer to have stayed with the status quo.

Let's go back to the Israelites. They're on the run, crying out to the Lord, challenging Moses and his response: "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today, for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. ¹⁴**The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.**

Let's keep this in mind – These people have witnessed the ten plagues. They watched as the Nile turned to blood, as locusts darkened the sky, as the firstborn of Egypt were spared — by a God who marked their doorposts and passed over their homes. They have seen it. And yet, standing at the edge of the sea, with an army at their backs, their memory seems to fail them entirely.

Sound familiar? Because I think that's one of the most honest and human things in all of scripture. **That we can be people who have seen God work — in our families, in our health, in the unexpected kindness of strangers, in the way a door closed that had to close so another could open — and then find ourselves, weeks or months or years later, at the edge of our own Red Sea, absolutely certain we've been abandoned, afraid that if we try, we'll drown.**

So, they're reminded: Be Still. Don't run back. Don't surrender. Don't try to go it alone. Just stand firm — and *watch*. That's not nothing, by the way. Standing firm when everything in you wants to flee? That takes everything you have.

Standing at the edge, I did not feel like I was about to witness a miracle. I knew it was going to be a mess. I felt embarrassed. I felt like I was going to land flat on my face, or rather my belly — which, frankly, was the outcome. No matter what my instructor offered as advice, or my kid's sweet waves from the side, I kept thinking: you clearly don't know my

body. But here's what I've come to understand about that moment — and about the Israelites in theirs. The invitation isn't to feel brave. The invitation is to move *anyway*.

Verse 15 is the pivot of this whole passage. God says to Moses: "*Why do you cry out to me? **Tell the Israelites to go forward.***"

God says "Go." Not "once you feel ready." Not "once the path is clear." Not "once the army retreats." Just *Be Still, watch and see what God can do, and then Go*.

And then — then — the sea parts. Moses lifts his staff and walls of water rise on either side. The ground beneath their feet is dry. But notice: they don't get to see any of that until they take a step.

I think about the moments in my own life when God has asked me to move before I could see the path. Saying yes to something I wasn't sure I was qualified for. Letting go of something familiar because I could feel, in my bones, that I was supposed to. Having a hard conversation I'd been avoiding for months. Starting something new when the old thing felt safer, even when the old thing was costing me.

Maybe you have those moments too. Maybe you're in one right now.

Maybe you're standing at the edge of something — a career change, a relationship, a health diagnosis, a calling you haven't said yes to yet — and you're doing the math, and the math isn't working. The army is behind you. The sea is in front of you. And the voice in your head sounds a lot less like Moses and a lot more like the crowd: *It would have been better to stay in Egypt*.

I want to offer you what Moses offered the Israelites: Be Still and then Go Forward. The Lord will fight for you.

Not because the path will be obvious. Not because the water will part before you take the first step. But because the God who led them out of Egypt — the God who has shown up in your life in ways you might have already half-forgotten — that same God has not run out of faithfulness.

Now — I should be honest with you. My dive was not graceful. My instructor was kind about it, but I made a belly flop that had my family quickly looking the other way in a way I can only describe as supportive avoidance. The water caught me. I came up coughing a bit, laughing a lot, and half-floating, half-flailing like always.

And you know what? I did it again, and again, and again. And I'm still an awful diver. But I can swim! I am happy to report that at the end of my swim class; I received a Level 5

American Red Cross Certificate. I asked and my instructor said he if I finish Level 6 I could become a lifeguard.

The Israelites made it to the other side. The Egyptian army did not. And in verse 31, after the water rushes back, scripture says this: *"When the Israelites saw the great power that the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses."*

They believed.

Not before. Not at the edge of the sea. Not when Moses told them to Go. After the sea closed. After their feet were dry on the other side. After they saw it with their own eyes.

I think that's where faith often lives — not in certainty before the leap, but in the testimony and stories we share after we've made it across. So today, wherever you are, I want to invite you to ask yourself: What's my Red Sea right now? What is God calling me to move toward — even when the path isn't clear, even when the army feels close, even when the water looks deep?

And I want you to remember: You do not cross alone. You cross with the same God who has shown up before and will show up again. The God that holds you in the waters.

Amen.