Sermon: The Book of Exodus and Living Not by Lies

Bible Verses Referenced: Exodus 1:8-14, Exodus 2:23, Genesis 37-50

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for the gift of our church and of the ministry of St. Mark's, our young people, and this glorious day that we get to celebrate and rally together for you. And we ask that you would pour out your Holy Spirit among us, filling us with the knowledge and love of your Son, Jesus. May the ministry and preaching of Your Word be Your Word for His glory and His namesake.

It's in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen. So today we're going to begin a nine-week series on the Book of Exodus. And I know this is rally day and it's going to be fun, and hopefully this sermon will be somewhat fun. But I am going to talk about some heavy things, actually. So this is just a little disclaimer. This first chapter in the book of Exodus, on one level, we think about these stories as Sunday school stories, you know, little baby Moses and so on.

But I don't want you to miss the gravity of actually what is taking place in this story. The Israelites had found themselves in 400 years of cruel and tyrannical bondage. And the descriptions of that bondage, listen to some of the wording from Exodus chapter 1. The Pharaoh arose over Egypt, he's described as a new king who did not know Joseph.

That little phrase, "He did not know Joseph" is important because if you remember the stories from Genesis, that's where you find out how did the Israelites end up in Egypt in the first place. And you have that wonderful series of stories in the last third of the book of Genesis where Joseph is abused by his brothers, thrown into a pit because of their jealousy, sold into slavery, and he ends up in a slave's position in Egypt.

But from there rises through the ranks, through just being a person of integrity, all the way to becoming the number two right-hand man to Pharaoh. And when his brothers are in desperate need because of a famine that hits the land of Canaan, they rush to Egypt for salvation, and unbeknownst to them, is their brother, Joseph.

And Joseph, and there's a famous line, it says something to the effect of, "Though you meant this all for evil, God has used it for good, for the saving of many lives." And so, while they threw him in a pit out of jealousy and so on, God put Joseph exactly where he needed to be in order to rescue not only the Israelites from the famine, but also to save the entire nation of Egypt. And so, Joseph is a great hero.

But over time, and this is what happens generation to generation, people begin to forget why things are the way that they are. And how did things happen so that these Israelites are here in Egypt? And this king that arises, this new Pharaoh, it says, "He didn't know Joseph." This is hundreds of years later. He doesn't remember any of how the Israelites were so helpful.

And one way to think about knowing in the Bible, and this is a common way to think about it, is to know something is actually to love something. And this Pharaoh certainly does not love the Israelites. In fact, he's threatened by them. He despises them. Listen to the language. "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us.

Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." So they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. As they were building the store cities for Pharaoh, it describes them as being oppressed. But the more that they were oppressed, the more they multiplied, and more the Egyptians dreaded the people of Israel.

So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves. This was a cruel tyrannical bondage that was placed over the Israelites. Now, at the end of this section in Exodus, we didn't hear this red. It describes how while Pharaoh doesn't know the Israelites, God knows them.

Listen to the way it says in chapter two, verse 23, "During those many days the king of Egypt died and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God, and God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the people of Israel, and God knew. He knew them, which meant that He loved them.

And so this tyranny, this bondage that they found themselves by, in many ways, their own manking and the evil of other people was not a satisfactory situation for God and His people. Now, as we think about Exodus, one of the things that's so critically important, and we're going to be talking about this all over the course of nine weeks, so I hope you'll just keep coming back to church. You see what I'm doing there?

Trying to get you hooked. This is a bit of an introduction. There's gonna be a lot more. You just wait. So, one of the things that we need to be thinking about when we're thinking about the Book of Exodus is Exodus is, in the Old Testament, the redemptive historical event. It is the cross and resurrection of the Old Testament. I mean, think about it. Can you think of anything other than, say, maybe creation itself and the flood that is so dramatic and miraculous and profound by the action of God?

There really isn't anything else in the entirety of the Old Testament other than the Passover and the plagues against Egypt and the deliverance of the Israelites through the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh's army. That whole complex of events and all the things that surround it, the New Testament, beginning with Jesus, applies to what He has come to do. Jesus is bringing about a new Exodus.

Only the redemption that He is bringing through the Passover of His bloodshed is one that will rescue us not from just the cruel bondage of an earthly Pharaoh, but from the tyrannical powers of the evil Trinity itself. You know the evil Trinity, right? Have you heard of the evil Trinity? There's the Good Trinity, you know the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But there's also the evil Trinity.

Who's the number one in the evil trinity? Satan, right? And then you have the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God, so the world. And then one member of the evil trinity actually lives within each of one of us. It's called the sin nature and the flesh, the old self if you're a Christian. And so these three persons of the evil trinity, these three powers, these three forces collude against one another.

And what the argument of the New Testament is, is that Jesus has come to redeem us from the bondage of slavery to Satan, the world, and the flesh, and liberate us from that captivity and tyranny of these three powers, and set us free through His salvation and redemption and deliverance. And so we connect up things like the waters of the Red Sea to the waters of baptism.

And it's really quite brilliant how the entire Bible works together and informs itself over and over again throughout its pages. It's almost as if it was written by a grand designer. It's really kind of cool once you start to see the connections between the various aspects of Scripture.

So one of the things as we think about the application of the Exodus to our own lives in our day and age, is we always have to be mindful that these three persons of the evil trinity are always wanting to oppress humanity, and particularly the church. And so, just because we live in one of the greatest countries that's ever been, the United States, with all of its wonderful blessings and freedoms, we must always remain vigilant because it can be lost in an instant.

And so part of the challenge and my hope in our rally of Rally Day is that we would take responsibility for the moment in which we're living in this country. I mean, there are some rocky things going on, and that's not new. I mean, it's always been such. We've always had generations that have had to be vigilant with the forces of tyranny.

I love an old speech that was given by a businessman named I think it's Henry Prentice. I meant to look it up before I came here. I got the quote, but he was speaking to a group of college kids in 1943 in the middle of World War II, when you had the great axis of evil, you know, just decimating Europe and the Pacific.

And he addresses these college students, and the name of his speech had to do with inbiding them with a sense of competency to be citizens of their society. And he says this, "paradoxically enough, the release of initiative and enterprise made possible by our popular self-government ultimately generates disintegrating forces from within." Again and again, after freedom has brought opportunity and some degree of plenty, the competent become selfish, luxury loving and complacent.

The incompetent and the unfortunate grow envious and covetous. And all three groups turn aside from the hard road of freedom to worship the golden calf of economic security.

The historic cycle seems to be from bondage to spiritual faith, from spiritual faith to courage, from courage to liberty, from liberty to abundance, from abundance to selfishness, from selfishness to apathy, from apathy to dependence, and from dependency back to bondage once more.

You know, as I listen to that list in that stages that Ms. Apprentice lays out there, I kind of think it feels like we're in that abundance, complacency, apathy mode a little bit, among the population of our country. And dare I say, among the population of the church, where people, by and large, have stopped going to church.

On any given Sunday, and of course I'm not talking about you, I'm not, because you're here. But on any given Sunday, about 90% of the population is not worshiping the Lord. Wow. Brothers and sisters, something is amiss, and we have some work to do.

And one of the things that I hope that you will hear from this Exodus passage is it's actually individual personal responsibility that makes the difference. It's the Hebrew midwives of all people. Shifa and Pua, what cool names they have. But these two ladies were commanded by the Pharaoh to put to death the Hebrew boys as they were being born.

And here's a serious matter that we all need to be thoughtful about. The forces of tyranny always go after the boys. You need to know that. And the reason why it's right here in this passage, because there's nothing more threatening to tyranny than masculine, strong men who have a sense of identity and know who they are, and have a knee that doesn't bend to tyranny, but is submitted to the God of the universe.

That is why Nazi Germany went after the Jews with such fervor. Because the Jewish people, the Israelites, when they are strong, they are strong. Their men and their women, for that matter, know exactly who they are in relationship to God, and they are willing to sacrifice anything for the sake of not losing that relationship and that connection to the living God.

And you see that in the bravery of those two Hebrew midwives who, though they were commanded by Pharaoh, refused to bend the knee to Pharaoh and protected the little Hebrew boys from death. And I love that there's a joke in here. You know Pharaoh comes to him and says, "Well, how come these Hebrew boys seem to be, oh, you know the Hebrew women, they're just very vigorous, and the babies, they just pop right out and we can't get to them fast enough." Oh, well then throw them in the river.

Get rid of them. One of the things that is so critically important for those of us who are parents and grandparents and as a congregation, we have to steward this next generation. I mean, it is absolutely critical that the moms and the dads of our community are well-supported and well-resourced to help that next generation.

One, just make it without falling prey to the forces of tyranny that would take them out, and they want to take them out. Beck, I'm using some extreme examples of, you know, I talked about Nazi Germany, but Communist Russia. In 1974, there was a man named Alexander Solzenitzkin who was just a brilliant writer and commentator, political commentator, and he was a person of freedom.

And he was speaking into the USSR and communist Russia and the Soviet Union at a time when people were being arrested for standing up and standing forth for the truth. And he was delivering a speech on the radio, and they cut the speech off the powers that be. And that day, he was arrested.

But he was to go to the gulag, but ultimately ended up exiled to the West. And he released the full text of the speech, which was titled, "Live not by lies." I'll just read just a little excerpt. It's worth reading the entire thing. But he talks about when violence bursts onto the peaceful human condition, its face is flush with self-assurance.

It displays on its banner and proclaims, "I am violence! Make way, step aside, I will crush you." But violence ages swiftly, and a few years pass, and it's no longer so sure of itself. And so to profit itself up, to appear decent, it will, without fail, call forth its ally, lies. For violence has nothing to cover itself with but lies.

And lies can only persist through violence. And it's not every day, not on every shoulder that violence brings down its heavy hand. It demands of us only a submission to lies, a daily participation in deceit, and this suffices for our fealty. And therein we find, neglected by us, the simplest and the most accessible key to our liberation, a personal non-participation in lies.

Even if all is covered by lies, even if all is under their rule, let us resist in the smallest way. Let their rule not through Me. Live not by lies. Those Hebrew midwives were living not by lies. It's the same thing that's happening with Peter in the Gospel passage.

When everybody is fumbling around as to who the true identity of Jesus is when it's absolutely obvious that He is God in the flesh and the Messiah. And Jesus asks His other disciples, "Who do you say that I am? What's the word out on the street?" And people are saying you're a prophet. You're a good teacher. You know, you're like John the Baptist or one of the Jeremiah.

He says, "Who do you say that I am?" "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my

church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. What did Peter do in that moment that got such a bold commendation from Jesus?

He proclaimed the most important truth that has ever been uttered that Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus, you are the king. And as soon as he said that, Peter was attacked by the evil one. That's next week's passage. When Jesus says to Peter after he, you know, Peter, or Jesus, you can't die on the cross, and Peter says, or Jesus says to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan." Live not by lies, Peter.

Peter, church, beloved, Charlie Hold, all of us, we're living in a day and age where there are a lot of lies. And particularly in the raising up of our children, I mean, if you think about how this particular passage ends, it's so fascinating how God orchestrates this.

You know, Moses ends up in the daughter of Pharaoh's keeping, in Pharaoh's house, and in that house, the way that you would be raised naturally, if you were raised, is to be encouraged to live into your self-centeredness. Because what Pharaoh ultimately is, is the supreme manifestation of the narcissistic individual. And when narcissists take control of societies, they are monsters.

The history of humanity shows that. And Moses could have been raised up like that in Pharaoh's household. But instead, God orchestrated it so that his true mother could actually raise him and teach him the values of the Jewish and Hebrew people so that he could learn not to bend the knee to His self, but to bend the knee to the God of the universe.

Moses will become the great deliverer of the Israelites and have the strength of character to be able to face-to-face with the most evil and powerful man of his time, Pharaoh himself, and tell him to his face, "Let my people go." Where does that kind of faith and bravery and courage reside in our minds and hearts and in our agenda for our own children?

This is a critical time for us as a people. And I want to encourage us as we're going forward. One, we're going to go out and have a great barbecue and celebration and get the church year kicked off with a lot of fun. But I also want us to be sober-minded about what we're about. This is important days, and what we're about here, yeah, it's about fun and energy and excitement, but it also has a real serious task to it as well.

And we're raising up the next generation of leaders for this community and for this country. And so let's get about that task together.