

WELCOME 25th June 2023 – 4th Sunday after Pentecost '23 A

Exodus 5:1-6:13

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups** on Friday @ 1p.m.

As we move into this week...

The Summit. **The** Amazing Race. Survivor.

All these reality shows involve a journey, & all contain a promise: a "pot of gold" "financial freedom" at the end of the contest.

Along the way there are challenges & obstacles which often breed doubt, discouragement, & despair as people are forced to face their limitations. When things don't go according to plan, when who they are, what they can do & what drives their lives just isn't enough...they reach the end. It's these very questions that are at the heart of the journey of promise we encounter in the book of Exodus.

"Who is the Lord?" and "Who am I?" are key questions we each must answer in our life's journey. They are questions that confront us when things seem to deteriorate rather than improve, when the promise seems distant rather than real. It's then we discover the greatest obstacles in life lie not without us but within & it is **this** obstacle to the promise we explore today. For when God conquers the obstacle within us we discover real freedom not just now but forever.

We'll also find some fun ways to mark God's goodness to us, Living Water Fellowship over this last decade...10 years in mission together in this way as Christ's people...there's great joy all around us...we'll share some glimpses of that & yes we'll get to lunch sooner rather than later!

We'll experience & share that today...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Our Father, Lord and God, restrain our thoughts, so that we don't wander into the temporary worthless things of the world or try to stand in the place where only you belong. Unite our hearts to your love. Remind us of the height & depth & breadth of your love for us & fill us to overflow. By your Spirit guide every thought word & deed today so that your will is accomplished in each of us. All that is for our good and the growth of your kingdom among us grant through Jesus Christ our Lord....Amen

We'll sing along...Goodness of God

LIVING WATER MOMENT

1. 1 Highlight of being part of LWF...helps you remember why we're here
2. 1 Prayer you are praying for LWF this year

FAITH CHAT: AFTER 1ST READING

What do you think is the biggest obstacle to people coming to faith in Jesus?

FAITH CHAT: AFTER 2ND READING

How do you try to overcome the "obstacles" people have between themselves & Jesus?

4 PENTECOST '23 A – A JOURNEY OF PROMISE: OBSTACLES TO THE PROMISE
10TH ANNIVERSARY THANKSGIVING SERVICE

One fun way to begin a Bible study or to help you get inside the Bible text...maybe you did this if you taught Sunday School or led a youth group...is to simply ask...With which character in the narrative do you most identify? Who in the narrative seems most like you? To whom do you feel a particular kinship?

I'll lay out some options (it's multiple choice) & then we'll show hands...

I may even ask "WHY?" **But hold your answer until I say...**

- A. Moses reluctant resistant servant of Yahweh
- B. Aaron innocent bystander conscripted to help out
- C. Random Israelite/people of God just trying to survive
- D. Pharaoh entrenched in your position not about to give up the power or privileges life has given you
- E. Random Egyptian none-the-wiser about the power politics of Pharaohs but certainly enjoying the benefits of their reign
- F. One of Pharaoh's "slave drivers" Just following orders but like it when you can throw your weight around

There is no "G" 'All of the above'...so...Moses? Aaron? Israelite? Pharaoh? Egyptian? "Slave drivers"? Ok...M? A? I? P? E? S?

Interestingly enough...every time I've ever done this...nobody ever says Pharaoh. Never. Nobody. Why do you think that is?

I raise that because this week I was in a discussion w/ mostly not-yet-Xns about the nature of sin...it didn't start that way. Original question was "Is religion necessary for morality?" Now you know Xnty is not a religion it's a relationship, but I didn't want to go there because the conversation was about morality. One person made the claim that sin originates in the pursuit of pleasure...Humans seek to maximize pleasure to the highest degree & in that pursuit throw our morals out the window & take everything else into the fire of pleasure along w/ it. He thought religion helped restrain our desire for pleasure. He has obviously never seen me near the morning tea table...

I responded like you've heard 1000X...straight to Luther...direct quote/not...**All** sin is a sin of the 1st commandment." Sin in all its arms & flourishes is about absolute autonomy...I'm the only boss of me. All sin finds it home in me/you seizing control of life that is supposed to be lived responsive to accountable to obedient to God. All sin is grounded in the desire to be God for self...to call the shots on life as we know it. God created good beautiful & pleasurable things...it's the pursuit of the created

"things" opposed to a relationship w/ the Creator that spells trouble. (Rom 1:18-3:20 as well as Gen 3) All sin is that great debate in our hearts/souls about who is God.

Wait...we just heard that question: *Moses & Aaron went & spoke to Pharaoh. They told him, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go so they may hold a festival in my honour (worship me) in the wilderness.'" "Is that so?" retorted Pharaoh. "Who is the Lord? Why should I listen to him & let Israel go? I don't know the Lord, & I will not let Israel go."* And. There. It. Is. Pharaoh puts words to the age old human debate "Who is the Lord?" Which means the **REAL** answer to our original question is "**D**" **PHARAOH** Who am I most like in the narrative? Pharaoh. Every living soul on earth is turned toward our own desire to be God. Why should I listen? Why should I trust? Why should I do what God desires or demands of me? **I WILL NOT...**

Pharaoh knows what he knows & is sure he doesn't need to know any more... Even. When. He's. Wrong. You know what that's called? Pride...many ways **THE SIN** against 1st Commandment...Every other sin leads me away from God. Pride tries to put me above God. Pride says to God & everyone else, "I know best. If I want your input...but I don't." "A proud man is always looking down on things & people; & of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you." **C.S. Lewis** Pride will not let Pharaoh see Moses is speaking as God speaks...to the arrogance to the self-importance to the conceit that will kill him because it has deafened his ears & hardened his heart...When I become my own Pharaoh I create problems all around me...I not only put an obstacles in my own way but also in the way of others from seeing who God is & from experiencing the freedom & restoration he offers...

So...Pharaoh makes life worse for the Israelites. When you live as Pharaoh life becomes one extended battle royal to interfere w/ God's plans...to throw every obstacle including the kitchen sink in the way...But remember...this narrative isn't finally about Pharaoh or Moses or any of the other bit players. The Exodus is God's story from start to finish...And God always works through his faithful people & their circumstances to see his promise to fulfillment.

"Therefore, say to the people of Israel: 'I am Yahweh. I will free you from your oppression & will rescue you from your slavery in Egypt. I will redeem you with a powerful arm & great acts of judgment. I will claim you as my own people, & I will be your God. Then you will know that I am Yahweh your God who has freed you from your oppression in Egypt.'

God stakes the honour & glory & power of his Name on overthrowing every Pharaoh...every bondage...every slavery...every obstacle so that we can be his & his alone & his forever. *So Moses told the people of Israel what the Lord had said, but they refused to listen anymore. They had become too discouraged by the brutality of their slavery.* At this stage they are so beat down...discouragement & disappointment &

despair have set in like hard concrete in the pit of their stomachs...I suspect we could go around the room & share that sort of story too...a time when it was just too hard to trust that anything good would come from all those promises of God...

But the Lord spoke to Moses & Aaron & gave them orders for the Israelites & for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. The Lord commanded Moses & Aaron to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. Neither the pride of Pharaoh, the discouragement of God's people, the brutality of their slavery or the fickleness of the human heart can prevent God from drawing to himself the people whom he has chosen as his own... not then...not now...not ever... So here's the good news... The Pharaoh in you & me is dead, buried, & powerless to hold you. *God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them; & he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.* **2 Cor 5:19.** The Pharaoh-destroying reconciling work of Christ is finished...and like Moses & Aaron God didn't give that message to anyone else. He gave it to us...you & me...God spoke. God commanded. God's will will be done.

God has chosen you as his prized beloved child & destined you as an agent of his grace...you are free...no chain can bind you no sin can stop you the Pharaoh inside is defeated. You are truly free. God has numbered the hairs on your head, you are free from gripping fear & choking terror. God still rules over all things...so nothing happens to you by accident. In the face of despair you can live in obedience to the One who has already stood in the darkness of death the gloom of the grave the pit of hell & emerged holding you in his arms. In every situation of life, the hand of God in the completed work of Jesus Christ is at work in you, leading you from where you are at this moment to where you are supposed to be in the next. Often that leading will be in ways, through paths & to destinations that make no sense & scare you out of your wits. Being God's servants does not mean escape from dangerous places; it means the opportunity to be the voice & the hands of Christ in them.

TAKE IT HOME- *THE LORD SPOKE TO LWF & GAVE THEM ORDERS...COMMANDED THEM TO LEAD HIS PEOPLE HERE INTO FREEDOM...GOD WAS IN CHRIST RECONCILING LWF TO HIMSELF & GAVE US THE GOOD NEWS OF RECONCILIATION...*

What obstacles in your own heart do you need God to remove to experience the freedom he gives for our journey?

To whom will you offer that message of reconciliation & freedom this week?

Let's pray with that in mind...

Gracious Father, you have claimed us as your own and set us to work in your world for the sake of Christ and for the expanding embrace of your Kingdom. By your Spirit use all our efforts and energies so that your church is strengthened, your mission furthered, and your Name praised. Through Jesus Christ we pray...Amen.