



THE JOURNEY BEGINS

September 13, 2020

Introduction

Invitation

Call to Worship:

Today and every day, we begin our journey with God. We are offered the opportunity to start over, to renew our relationship with God and each other through worship and fellowship, through prayer and reading the word. Let us begin our journey! Let us worship together!

Hymn: "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"

Reading the Word: Exodus 14:19-31

Message: "The Journey Begins"

Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson

Prayer:

God of the Exodus, God of all, we thank you for leading us on the journey of life and along the path of faith. We sometimes face walls of water and difficult blockades in our lives, and during those times, it is often hard to remember that you are with us. In spite of our fear and anxiety, you lead us through those situations and help us to reach the other side where we find new opportunities, ways to relearn, adjust, and live into the newness of life that presents itself to us. Remind us again and again, as you did with the nation of Israel, that you will not abandon us; rather, you will guide us and teach us how to keep on living in faith and trusting you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Hymn: "He Leadeth Me, O Blessed Thought"

Blessing

Exodus 14:19-31

The 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. It 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.

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. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. At the morning watch, the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army and threw the Egyptian army into panic. He clogged 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."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn, the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.



**SERMON TRANSCRIPT
GIVEN BY
Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson**

Message “The Journey Begins”

Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson

How many of us occasionally long to start over again? Maybe we wish we could relive a time in our lives when we could go back and do things differently, or perhaps we long for the “way things used to be.” I suspect many of us wish we could turn back the clock to a time before COVID-19 disrupted our lives. We want things to be the way they used to be.

The Israelites who were set free from slavery in Egypt were the descendants of the tribes of Israel, and most of them did not remember what life was like before slavery. Their circumstances as slaves in Egypt were difficult, to say the least, and many did not survive. Imagine their joy and excitement when they learned that they were being set free, and then, when freedom seemed so close, Moses led them to the banks of the Red Sea, where they stopped short, wondering how they would be able to cross. Suddenly, Egypt seemed like a safe place! Maybe this trip wasn't so great after all! At least, in Egypt, they at least knew what life was like.

God must have seemed far away and uncaring, but just about the time they were giving up hope, their leader, Moses lifted his face toward the sky, listened, raised his staff, and right before their very eyes, the waters of the sea began to churn, move and separate. They had a path so they could go across! God had done a new thing, and they were able to move to the other side, to freedom, and also to the unknown.

Freedom was something they did not know and had not experienced, so they were not prepared for what was needed to make it on their own. God knew that, and instead of sending them the short route to the Promised Land, they would spend the next forty years in the wilderness learning about what it meant to live as God's people and how they were to manage the newfound freedom they had been given. Learning that freedom came with responsibility was often difficult for them, and they faltered often, as we shall see in the coming weeks.

Yet, as they stood on the banks on the other side of the sea, they realized that God had saved them, so, in that moment, they celebrated with joy. They had a new beginning, new opportunities, new ways of living, and many discoveries to make. Taking the journey of newness would not always be easy, but then sometimes that is the challenge of moving into something new.

New beginnings happen in our lives all the time. When we think about what freedom means to those who have been incarcerated and the challenges they face when re-entering society, we find a good example of people learning what their new life in post-jail time could be. They are most often labeled, finding work is hard, and the world does not look like it did before they went to prison. This can be disorienting, and many have ended up back in jail. Fortunately, there are also many who have re-entered society and become productive citizens who, in turn, help others who are re-entering society by supporting them because they understand what they have been through.

When we experience new beginnings, we realize that this brings change, something so many people detest. But change is inevitable and recognizing that there is always a time of adjustment and re-orientation helps us all to keep moving forward. We experience change and a “new normal” in many ways and through many circumstances. Just to name a few: going to school or college, starting a new job, retiring, recovering after an illness, adjusting after the death of a loved one or following a divorce, getting married, having a baby, learning to drive, moving to a new location, being promoted, changing vocations, the children leave home, and many more situations. Even growing in our relationship with God and each other can bring a series of new beginnings.

With each change, with each vista that seems to stretch out before our eyes, we face the unknown, just as the Israelites did standing at the threshold of the wilderness. As we experience the changes, we also have choices that we can make. When we face the wilderness, we can go through it with hope and determination to keep pushing through the muck that we sometimes encounter. We can choose to learn from the experience, to find ways to thrive in spite of the challenges. We can choose to follow the light of Christ that leads us and trust that we will arrive in a new place that will look different and will eventually bring healing and wholeness where we need it; or, it may bring us to where God has been leading us all along.

Trusting in God’s guidance and finding companions to support us along the way will help us to find our new beginnings, including forgiveness, reconciliation, new opportunities, and living into being the person God sees in us. It is in finding this new place, that we are better able to care about and reach out to others by sharing the love and grace of God that we have experienced in our own lives.

May our new beginnings, whatever they may be, bless our lives so we can be a blessing to others. Amen.