

Nokesville UMC Sunday Worship
September 13, 2020
Rev. YoungMin Kim

No More Bondage for God's People
Exodus 14:30-31

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What news caught your eye this week? Wildfires in California? The sky and cities were covered with orange skies filled with ashes. We have numerous victims, missing ones, and frontline workers who put their lives to save people, animals, and nature. How about the president's interview with Woodward? How about violent suppression by officers? How about violent threats of BLM protesters to cafeteria customers who enjoyed coffee or lunch? Regardless of what we believe, it's easy to become filled with anger—anger at those who stand in opposition of our viewpoints. And we come to blame them and are also blamed by them. My Facebook feed is full of mutual slander. How about your Facebook page? How about your life?

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According to the Lectionary schedule, we read Exodus 14:30-31. A long time ago, when the nation of Israel was not formed yet, God chose a faithful and righteous man, Abraham, and gave him a promise: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great..." (Gen. 12:2). This promise was like an annunciation of the state of Israel. And this promise was confirmed and handed over to his son, Isaac, and his grandson, Jacob. After three generations, however, God's promise seemed to disappear. It seemed that God forgot His promise. To become a nation, they needed a large number of people, but they had only 20-30 people, and they didn't have their own land. Nevertheless, God kept His promise one by one.

First, God changed the name of Jacob to "Israel" after he wrestled with the angel of the Lord. And then, through one of his twelve sons, Joseph, Jacob, his sons, and all their families were able to survive from severe famine in the land of Canaan by moving to the fertile land of Egypt. There, Jacob's descendants—Israel's descendants—became prosperous as the generations went by. There were only a few dozen people in the beginning, but they became thousands and tens of thousands over the following four hundred years. They gradually formed themselves into the nation of Israel.

However, their situation suddenly changed. Egyptians believed that the Israelites would become a threat soon because they grew in number and became more powerful. So, they decided to enslave all Israelites in the land of Egypt. The Israelites' peaceful and stable lives changed into lives of labor, pain, and discrimination in a moment. We do not know the exact slavery period of the Israelites in Egypt, but we can roughly calculate that the Israelites were slaves when Moses was born, and Moses brought all the Israelites from Egypt when he was about 80 years old. Thus, their slavery period continued at least 80 years or more.

As time passed, their life of slavery became much harsher than before, and their lives were a series of suffering. God was silent for their suffering, but did not cover His eyes and ears. God said, "The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them" (Exo. 3:9). And God finally decided to save His people in the land of Egypt by calling Moses, "So come, I will send you to

Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt” (v. 10). Moses and his people eventually crossed over the Red Sea and became completely free from slavery. And they began to find their way out to the land that God first promised to Abraham, a land of flowing with milk and honey... the Promised Land.

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The exodus must be a fabulous story showing how God loved His people and how powerful God was. This also shows an appearance of the Israelites’ great national leader and a beginning of Israel as a nation. There were less than a hundred people when they entered into Egypt but became about 2.5 million when they escaped from Egypt.

But here, rather than talking about their external changes, I would like to focus on their inner changes. That is, finishing their slavery after about 80 or more years, they finally became free men. Their status completely changed, but this does not simply mean their physical freedom. Think about it! They were victims of discrimination, violence, insults, and things like that. We cannot assume we understand their mental and spiritual pain. For the Israelites with physical and mental suffering in the name of slavery, God saved them. God set His people free from slavery. The meaning of being free (or being saved) is to be free from physical and mental mistreatment and suffering. In the exodus period, to become people of God meant to be free from such things. In other words, becoming children of God is to become free from bondage of such oppression.

How about Jesus? While the exodus Israelites were saved through Moses, we were saved and called righteous through Jesus Christ. Being saved by Jesus, we are no longer slaves to sin. The Apostle Paul said, “Now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God...” (Romans 6:22). What is sin? Well, we can explain what sin is in many different ways, but in the Wesleyan tradition, sin is a state in which we are separated from God, whether in terms of particular things that we do or don’t do. If so, what is the status of being separated from God? This is my interpretation that such status is the status that there is no love of God. Such status can be expressed as violence, hatred, discrimination, separation, injustice, destruction, anger and things like that. We were once slaves to violence, anger, hatred, discrimination, separation, injustice, destruction and things like that, but now we have been freed from them, the so-called “sin” through the complete sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

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Do you see different forms of sin around you, in our community, in the nation, and/or around the world? By witnessing violence, anger, hatred, discrimination, separation, injustice, destruction and things like that, what is your reaction? Please check yourself whether you have added to the violence, anger, hatred, discrimination... while you witness and react to violence, anger, hatred, discrimination...

God redeemed the Israelites from slavery and claimed them as the people of God. Likewise, Jesus Christ redeemed us and claimed us as God’s own children. That is, once we met and accepted Jesus as our Lord, we are free from discrimination, violence, hatred, blame... Furthermore, the people of God or the children of God are those who create love of God in places where there is no love. Whether you are Republicans, Democrats, or Independents, please remember your spiritual state—that you are free from sin. Amen.