

Year 1: Session 3 – Moses and the Israelites exit Egypt

Class 9: Exodus 14:5-6, 9-16, 21-28 – *Parting the Red Sea*

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Review events preceding this story (from previous lessons)
- Highlight how the sea is understood as a symbol of chaos
- Focus on the role of being still in relationship to prayer, especially when immersed in the chaos

Materials needed

- Video clip from “Toy Story 3” (on rfour.org website)
- Electronics that show the movie
- Paper and writing utensils for each student

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- For the opening question for today’s class, I [the teacher] will ask the question, and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we’ll go around the circle.
- When it’s your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- *Here’s this week’s question:* When faced with a problem that you can’t figure out how to fix/solve, what do you usually do?

TRANSITION TO VIDEO CLIP

- We will see in today’s scripture story that the Israelites find themselves in a very difficult situation, one that is very chaotic and life-threatening.
- When we are faced with these types of situations, we usually choose one of these two options: Fight or Flight.
- But there are other options.
- In the following video clip from Toy Story 3 – Woody and Buzz Lightyear and the rest of the gang find themselves faced with a chaotic and life-threatening situation at a garbage/recycling station.
- Let’s see how they respond to the situation

WATCH VIDEO CLIP

ASK

- At the beginning of the clip, what are the toys/characters trying to avoid? (the shredder and then the fire/incinerator)
- Do they fight or flee the shredder? (flee in a way that feels like a struggle/fighting sort of way)
- When the characters are first thrown into the pit and are headed toward the fire, how do they respond? (try to scramble away)
- Once the scrambling proves futile, what do they do? (hold hands and wait)
- Do some of the characters give up on the scrambling before other characters do? (yes, Buzz, actually, gives up first – Woody gives up last)
- What then saves them? (the claw! -- this is funny because the three creatures that use the claw were won by Andy – the boy owner of the toys -- in one of those arcade games that uses the claw to try and grab a toy and drop it in a slot – a role reversal of sorts)
- If the toys had still been scrambling around, would they have been as easy to pick up with the claw? (not at all – they would NOT have been together which means multiple attempts would've had to have been made by the claw – also they would've been moving and moving targets are harder to grab)

TELL

- When faced with high stress situations, the fight or flight instinct is strong in us.
- But like we just saw with the toys in the movie clip, fight or flight are not our only choices.
- We'll see how this fits with today's story in just a moment.
- But first, a quick review:
 - If you recall the two previous stories about Moses and the Israelites, there's been this conversation/argument between Moses and Pharaoh about letting the Israelites go.
 - This argument has had consequences for Pharaoh – ultimately leading to what we call the 10 plagues.
 - The last of the 10 plagues was the consequence that changed Pharaoh's mind.
 - We call it Passover, because God's "destroyer" *passed over* the homes that had followed God's instructions to kill a lamb and put its blood on the doorframe of the home.
 - So Pharaoh loses his firstborn and finally lets the Israelites go free.
- But, in today's story...Pharaoh is having other thoughts.
- Today's scripture story starts right after the Israelites physically leave their homes in Egypt.

READ Exodus 14:5-6, 9-16, 21-28

(recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse, including teachers)

5 When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the minds of Pharaoh and his officials were changed toward the people, and they said, "What have we done, letting Israel leave our service?" 6 So he had his chariot made ready, and took his army with him.

9 The Egyptians--all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, horsemen and troops--pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon. 10 As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. 11 They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" 13 Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. 14 The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." 15 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. 16 Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground."

21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, 22 and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground,

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with a wall of water on their right and on their left. 23 The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. 24 During the last watch of the night the LORD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. 25 He made the wheels of their chariots come off so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt." 26 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen." 27 Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the LORD swept them into the sea. 28 The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen--the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.

ASK

- Verse 5 and 6 – What does Pharaoh decide to do? (to pursue / re-capture the Israelites)
- Verse 11 & 12 – What do the Israelites tell Moses? (that it would've been better to have stayed in Egypt and serve the Egyptians because now they were going to die)
- Does that surprise you – that the Israelites would want to go back to the way things were even if those things involved being slaves? (yes and no – Yes, because it's not like they're leaving paradise. No, because people dislike the unknown even when entering the unknown will be for the better)
- Verse 14 – What does Moses tell the people to do? (you need to only be still – which is Biblical language for “Pray”)
- Verse 16 – What does God tell Moses to do? (Stretch his hand over the sea which will divide the water)
- What do you think would've happened had Moses *not* stretched his hand over the sea? Do you think God would've still parted the sea?
- Verse 22 – What does the story say the Israelites walked on? (dry ground)
- Verse 23 – What does the story say the Egyptians followed the Israelites into? (the sea)
- Verse 25 – What happened to the Egyptian army once it went into the sea? (was thrown into confusion / things stopped working correctly, like the wheels of chariots)
- Verse 26 – What is Moses told to do again? (stretch out his hand over the sea)
- Verse 28 – What happened to Pharaoh and his army? (was swallowed by the sea)

TELL

And...that's how the Israelites leave Egypt. There are a number of things to note in this story, though. Here are some of them:

- First, two literature things:
 - In the Bible, the sea is understood as a symbol for chaos. Throughout the Biblical narrative, there are a number of stories where God helps the people who are listening (not as a reward, but because listening is how the directions are understood/communicated) see God's path/way through that chaos. Today's story is one of these “God's path through the chaos” stories (the Noah story, the Jonah story and the Jesus walking on water story are some other good examples)
 - The ending of the story has a [deus ex machina](#) ending to it – just like the movie clip – where a greater force/power somewhat inexplicitly and unexpectedly saves the main characters. But, this story doesn't quite fit description of this literary device because God has been present all along; God doesn't just show up and save the people. Plus, the people had to cooperate.
- In order for the Israelites to hear/know God's way through the chaos, they have to be still (just like in the movie clip) and listen. This is an option other than “fight or flight:” Be still and listen for God. This is why Moses is telling the Israelites to be still. But what's difficult for them is that they are very afraid in a very chaotic moment – they're going to die! – and it is very difficult to be still and listen when you are afraid of dying in a chaotic moment.

- This is why, after Moses tells the people to be still, that God then talks to *Moses*. The reason God doesn't talk to all of the Israelites is because the Israelites are not practiced at hearing God while under stress. But, as we've seen throughout these stories, Moses has had lots of practice listening to God. In other words, he's better able to listen under pressure. He's had some practice that the rest of the Israelites do not have.
- Once Moses hears God, though, Moses still has to act for what God is saying to happen. For example, the Red Sea does not part or un-part until Moses does what he is told, which is to stretch out his hand.
- Again, we are presented with the question of God's violence against the Egyptians. As stated in previous lessons, I think one helpful way to think about this part of the story is to remember that Pharaoh was given 10 chances to let go of the Israelites. Ten different times, God (through Moses), told Pharaoh what Pharaoh's path through the chaos was: To let the Israelites go. But because Pharaoh kept ignoring this instruction, he kept experiencing plagues/destruction. And ultimately, he meets his own destructive end because he keeps thinking he knows the correct path through the chaos. Pharaoh should've been *nowhere near* the Red Sea. But because he thought he knew the best way through the chaos, he went into the sea and found himself over his head and was overwhelmed to the point of ruin. This is why the story says the Israelites walked on dry land, but the Egyptians followed them into the sea – the path for the Israelites through the chaos was not the same path for the Egyptians. The path through the chaos for the Egyptians was to stay at home.

TRANSITION to ACTIVITY

- Throughout these three stories, we've seen how Moses is able to hear rather well what God is saying.
- We especially see that in today's story, when, even under great stress, Moses is able to hear what God is saying and then participates in/does what he hears.
- It is not an easy thing to hear God (as we can tell since the rest of the Israelites don't remember to be still and don't seem to be able hear what God says – only Moses does)
- And the reason that Moses is good at listening prayer is because he practiced a lot. And he did his practicing when the stress was low.
- Think of how sports or musical instruments work: You practice *before* the game / concert not *during* the game / concert. If didn't practice beforehand, then you would not know what to do during the game/concert.
- Listening prayer is the same way.
- If we don't practice it in low stress situations, we're not going to do very well with it in high stress situations
- So we're going to do some low-stress listening prayer practice

EXPLAIN ACTIVITY

- We're going to do like Moses instructed the Israelites: We're going to be still (for five minutes).
- This means we're going to sit still and be quiet for those five minutes
- During those five minutes, if there are any thoughts or images that come to mind that seem important to you, write them down with the pen(cil) and paper we're passing out.
- Here are some things to pay attention for:
 - You might have some thoughts or images about a problem that you're having
 - You might have an insight about how to think about or feel about or understand someone that you know
 - You might have an insight about how to think about or or feel about or understand yourself
 - It is also quite possible that nothing will happen

- And then, afterwards, we'll go around the circle and share our experience. Also, if you wrote something down and want to share it, you can do so at that point.
- Any questions?

DO 5 minute Prayer Activity

ASK/TELL

- At this time, we'll go around the circle and share our individual experiences.
- The idea here is to help us to hear how the practice is for each of us, which in turn, might give us ideas about what to pay attention to/for the next time you do this.
- Remember, that you're sharing to help others, not to impress them, not to mislead them, and not to make a joke of this. You are free to pass on this as well – but the more we share the better the experience will be for all of us.
- As one of the teachers, I'll go first.

DO Sharing Activity

Note to teachers

- Do not expect your students to share because they probably won't. Pushing them to share probably isn't advised at this point, either. Most likely this was a first time experience for all of them and they are going to be shy about it as well as worried about what others thought/experienced.
- If no one else shares beyond you/the teachers, you might consider having some yes/no questions to ask them, like:
 - Was it hard to be still / quiet for five minutes?
 - Did the time seem to go quickly for anyone?
 - Did anyone have some thoughts come to mind that surprised them?
 - Does anyone feel any different now than they did before we started the activity? Maybe more relaxed/calm?

TELL

- Thank you to everyone for participating in this.
- It was great to practice listening prayer with you.
- What we just did here, you can also do this on your own – or even invite a parent to join you in it.
- Remember, the more often you practice listening prayer in low-stress times, the better you'll be at practicing listening prayer in high-stress times – which turned out to be very helpful for Moses in today's story.
- Next lesson, we'll be making some possibly surprising connections between these Moses/Israelites/Egypt stories and a childhood story about Jesus.

CLOSING PRAYER