

RESSURECTION OF OUR LORD | APRIL 9, 2023

EXODUS 14:26-29, 15:19-21 | PSALM 118:1-2, 14-17 | COLOSSIANS 3:1-4 |
MATTHEW 18:1-10

We began the great Three Days earlier this week by hearing of the exodus from Egypt. The drama of the escape from pharaoh begins with a meal. But it's a rather unusual meal, one that needs to be eaten in a hurry. The people are told that there is no time to wait for their bread to rise. No time to go strap on their sandals after they finish. They need to pack light, eat quick, and make a fast exit.

And when these enslaved people escape the Egyptians and emerge on the other side of the sea, a celebration breaks out. In today's first reading, we heard that "the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them: 'Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.'"

When Rabbi Waxman was here a couple of weeks ago, he pointed out something unusual in this story. Something so strange that anyone on that shore would have noticed it immediately but something that—truth be told—I'd never thought about before. If you were told that your life depended on packing light, moving quick, and making a silent departure, why on earth would you pack a bunch of tambourines?

Miriam trusted that God would lead them out of Egypt, of course. But there's something deeper going on as well. After all, what Pharaoh wants for these enslaved people was not death itself but diminishment. A people without hope, without a future, and without options. A people who can still breathe but no longer sing.

That's why Miriam packs the tambourines. Because she knows that just surviving, just existing, just enduring isn't enough. It isn't enough for her. It isn't enough for Moses and Joshua. It isn't enough for God. And it shouldn't be enough for us.

So when Miriam packs her tambourine, she is not just saying no to Pharaoh but no to anything that would diminish or lessen or water down the life that God has entrusted to her and her community. And she is saying Yes to God's promise. Yes to freedom, Yes to liberation, and Yes to God's shalom.

When pharaoh sees the people of God, he sees only a people conditioned to his No. But stuffed away in Miriam's bag is a hidden Yes.

For two millennia, we have understood the resurrection of Jesus in light of that Exodus story. That just as God led the Israelites out of slavery and into freedom through the prophet Moses, God leads us out of death and into life through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

And sure enough, as we heard the story of Jesus's time in Jerusalem this past week, we heard the story of another hidden Yes. God's Yes in Jesus. Even in Gethsemane, even on trial, even on the cross, even in the dark tomb, that Yes is always present. It's obscured, overshadowed, overlooked but always there.

What we celebrate this Easter is the revelation of that Yes. That even when we try to cover it up and drown it out, God's Yes still breaks through. That when we say No to God,

when we push God outside the city, God responds not with a louder no but with a subversive Yes.

Or as the angel tells the women who arrive at the tomb expecting to find only death, “Come, see the place where they laid him... for he has been raised from the dead.” Jesus’s final resting place has become a place of new beginnings. The cross has become the tree of life. And our No has been transformed by God’s Yes. In dying our death, Jesus has given us his life.

This is all fine and good. Except that the world is still full of Nos. Jesus may have risen, but as one of our hymns puts it, “Still your children wander homeless / still the hungry cry for bread / still the captives long for freedom / still in grief we mourn our dead.” And so we may sympathize more with Miriam facing an uncertain future than the women filled with joy that first Easter morning.

And yet, as the author of Colossians reminds us, “your life is hidden with Christ in God.” God’s Yes can be difficult to hear. It can be overshadowed by illness and death and the many tombs that fill our lives. It can be drowned out by the voices like pharaoh’s that seek to preserve their own comfort and prosperity at the expense of our dignity and flourishing. It can even be lost in our own belief that we are unworthy of love and undeserving of compassion. And yet, we are told, our life is hidden with Christ. Our life is in God’s keeping where not pharaoh, not our worst impulses, not even death itself can overcome it. God’s Yes to us is never absent, only hidden with Christ.

This, of course, is why Miriam packed those tambourines. Because she knew her community’s life was not in the clutches of pharaoh but rested in the promises of God. And we are given her wisdom, her vision, every week when we gather around Christ’s meal. A meal that does not have to be eaten in a hurry for the fear of death. A meal that abundantly feeds all who gather. A meal that strengthens us for service and witness in God’s world. At this table, the body of Christ, crucified and raised, is given for you.

Our lives may be hidden with Christ in God. But here at table, we encounter what is really true about ourselves, our neighbor, and our creation. That God’s first and last word about us is always this: Yes.

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