Moving Forward

09/13/20
Y. Joe Kim

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. ***20*** *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.* ***21*** *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.* [22] *The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.* [23] *The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers.* [24] *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.* [25] *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."* [26] *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."* [27] *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.* [28] *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.* [29] *But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.* [30] *Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.* [31] *Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and <u>believed in the LORD</u> and in his servant Moses*. (Exodus 14:19-31).

1. A Miracle of 9/11

Last Friday we remembered the September 11 attacks that occurred 19 years ago. Many still mourn the loss and we often use the reminder "we will never forget" to remember the day. This morning, I'd like to share a miracle story from that day.

Genelle Guzman-MacMillan worked as a Port Authority employee on the 64th floor of the WTC' north tower. Genelle grew up in a Christian home but stopped attending church following her mother's death from cancer.

In her memoir, *Angel in the Rubble: the Miraculous Rescue of 9/11's Last Survivo*r, Genelle shares her story of survival and salvation. Genelle was trapped, being crushed by a steel beam after the attacks. She reached to an open space above her and prayed. She pleaded for hours with God to forgive her of her sins and to give her another chance.

She prayed, "God, if you give me a second chance, I promise I will do your will." When she finished praying someone grabbed her by her hand, saying, "I've got you. My name is Paul. Just hang on. They're going to get you out of there." Paul was one of the firefighters. They eventually pulled her from the rubble. She believes that God heard her prayers and sent an angel to rescue her.

2. Crossing of the Red Sea

The same God help the Israelites about 3,300 years ago. The Israelites were finally allowed to leave Egypt during the time of Moses. I am sure they were happy to be heading to the Promised Land. They probably wanted to get to their new home as soon as possible.

However, the Israelites didn't know where they were going. They followed the path that the Lord led them on with pillars of cloud and fire. Exodus 13:21 says, "***The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night.*** The clouds and fire were visible symbols of God's presence. God provided reassurance that he was controlling their direction. God was their GPS navigation system.

The Israelites were camping by the Red Sea when Pharaoh changed his mind and planned to attack the Israelites. 600 chariots and troops chased after the newly freed people. As Pharaoh's troops approached, the Israelites panicked. The people cried out to the Lord for help. They accused Moses of deceiving them into the desert to die. Moses assured the people that the Lord would deliver them from Pharaoh.

God calls Moses to deliver the people through the Red Sea. As Moses raises his staff, the water divides and the floor of the sea became dry ground. Then the angel of God who had been traveling in front of the people went behind them to protect them from the Egyptians. Can you imagine the scene of the crossing? Almost 2 million people with flocks and herds are walking through the sea. God's deliverance of the Israelites is dramatic and unbelievable. What happened to the Egyptians who chased the Israelites? The divided walls of water crushed the Egyptians and not a single soldier survived.

According to Exodus 14:4, the crossing of the Red Sea was God's idea. "***I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, so that I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord."*** God wanted to teach the Egyptians, the Israelites, and us how powerful He is.

3. No Turning Back

God's power works not only to deliver us from any troubles but also to strengthen our faith in the Lord. Have you heard of the hymn, "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus?" This hymn is based on the last words of a Christian who converted to Christianity by a Welsh missionary in the mid 19th century in Assam, India.

The village chief was angry after the man and his family converted to Christianity. The family was given the choice to renounce their faith or face execution. At the moment, the man sang, "*I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back, no turning back."*

When confronted again to deny his faith, the man sang, "*Though no one joins me, still I will follow. Though no one joins me, still I will follow. Though no one joins me, still I will follow. No turning back, no turning back.*" Finally, the man was given a last chance. The man sang, "*The cross before me, the world behind me. The cross before me, the world behind me. The cross before me, the world behind me. No turning back, no turning back.*" He had no fear of execution by the village chief. He believed that the Lord was with him.

The man, his wife, and his two children were all killed for their faith. Is this the end of the story? Not at all. The chief who ordered the killings was moved by the man's faith. The chief eventually accepted Jesus and the village people converted to Christianity. Even in the death of believers, God's miracles are ever present.

4. Conclusion

The story of the Exodus has become very real for many of us living in the current global situation. Many of us look forward to the day we can return to normal. Some suggest we may never go back to normal. Our future in many ways is unknown. Like the Israelites, we are traveling through a desert, not sure of where we may be going or what may be waiting for us when we arrive at our destination.

5. Application

Fear and being scared are often our natural response when we don't know what will happen in the future. But our passage this morning reminds us that our fear appears when we forget the very real presence of God with us in all situations and at all times. When the Israelites were terrified by the approaching Egyptians, Moses said, "***Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever***" (Exodus 14:13).

Today is our 9th outdoor service since the start of the pandemic. We celebrate even the smallest miracles of having the ability to have outdoor service together for 9 Sundays. I'm not sure whether we could have had even the right weather in 2019 to have 9 outdoor services together.

There may be rainy Sundays or complications in the future. We don't know for certain where we are going or what will be there at the end of the pandemic. However, we know that God has been with us, will be with us, and will continue to be with and care for us every step of the way.

Although our future is uncertain and unpredictable, God calls us to move forward as he leads us into the future. We have two choices. One is to remain where we are in fear and frustration. The other is to move forward in confidence that God would lead us in the right direction. Which one would you like to choose? I pray that we continue our life's journey towards the Promised Land and that our fears are washed away by the constant presence of God. Amen.