

**Meadowbrook Congregational Church**

**“Keeping Dry”**

**September 22, 2011**

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**Exodus 14: 19-31**

*19 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. <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. <sup>23</sup>The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. <sup>24</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>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.'<sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup>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. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>31</sup>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.*

Disciples of Christ minister Linda Hutton tells a story about a milkmaid and a holy man. The holy man lived in a remote location and he relied upon the milkmaid to bring him milk and food every day. She had the awful habit of arriving late daily. One day when the holy man scolded her about her tardiness, she explained that she had to walk along the bank of a river for a good distance before coming to a bridge that would take her to the other side. It was the river that was delaying her bringing the holy man his much needed supplies. He asked her, "Why don't you just walk across the water? It would save you a lot of time." From then on the milkmaid was never late. After a few days the holy man's curiosity got the best of him and he asked how the milkmaid managed to arrive so early. "Why," she responded, "I did as you told me. I now walk on the waters of the river." The holy man said, "This I must see. Let me go with you when you return to the village. If someone like you can walk on water, perhaps I can too!"

The two reached the river and without hesitation the milkmaid stepped onto the water and walked to the other side. She turned to watch the holy man. Slowly, carefully, he gathered

his robes up about his knees and stepped into the river. He took a few hesitant steps and began to sink. The milkmaid ran back across the waters and helped him to shore. "What went wrong?" asked the holy man. "Well sir, you said you believed you could walk on water, but then you gathered up your robes so as not to get them wet."

As people of faith, we act much like the holy man. We would love to experience and witness the hand of God at work in our complex lives. But we often live out our days in such a way that we refuse to place reliance upon the power of God. We are more likely to think we can be saved by our own cleverness or strength or possessions. In crossing the rivers of discouragement and difficulty, we gather up our robes to stay dry, relying upon our own ingenuity.

This morning's Scripture lesson is the memorable narrative detailing the crossing of the Red Sea. Perhaps most of us know this story best from the movie scene in *The Ten Commandments*, where Charlton Heston divides the special effects waters that were supposedly made of jello. There have been all sorts of rational and scholarly explanations of this miracle but they all seem to miss the point. The writer of Exodus wasn't concerned about the depth of the water or how the sea would part. The writer was convinced only that this was a miracle, an act of God, a demonstration of the strength of God in sharp contrast to the weakness of the people.

If you remember the story you will know that the people of Israel were living in slavery in Egypt. God had raised Moses to be their leader. God had acted upon their behalf, causing misfortune to fall upon their oppressors. By God's hand the Pharaoh had agreed to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt. By a pillar of cloud by day and a fiery pillar at night God had led them to the very edge of the Red Sea. But now in their exodus, they were trapped. Deep water on one side. Pharaoh's army on the other. They were struck with terror and helplessness. Where was God now? What were they going to do? Had they been brought here to die?

It may feel that way for us. The events of our world and of our lives may seem to have placed us in a tight corner. Economic uncertainty weighs upon our budgets, our jobs, our community, our very next purchase. Each week seems to bring a new crisis of instability in some land. Even the weather seems to be causing us more grief than relief. The recollection of the events of September 11, 2001 reminds us that perhaps we can never again be as safe as we thought we were. We are in deep water.

We roll up robes and give it a try. We tend to rely upon our own wisdom and guile. We can use our own abilities and capabilities to turn the momentum. We can tap our limited amounts of patience, compassion, and forgiveness to deal with the negative situations and people around us. Yet alone, we still get wet.

Then God commanded Moses to stretch his hand out over the sea. That phrase is mentioned three times in the story. When Moses obeyed, the waters parted, giving the children of Israel a safe passage. I suppose God could have magically transported the people to the other side by flying chariot or rainbow escalator. But it didn't work that way. God didn't use magic. God used the faithful action of the people.

How can we stay dry amidst the torrents of the waters of chaos that threaten us and keep us enslaved? We walk through the waters by faith. When we can see no way out, that is the time to trust in the One who has found a way for us forever. The story of the people of God is a story of God's hand in leading the faithful through the flood, over the Jordan, out of exile, from the belly of the whale, avoiding bloody and murderous Herods, and through the stormy Sea of Galilee. A story of deliverance is told; so we can remember it, believe in it, and tell others about it. God is mighty to save and God's purposes cannot be changed by the powers and principalities of the world.

How can we keep dry? By recognizing that our faith is part of the divine action. Moses didn't part the waters. God did. But Moses had to stretch out his hand and believe something would happen. His hand became an extension of God's power. And the people of Israel had to

walk through the Red Sea. They were not totally passive. Their walk was a realization that could at least recognize the possibilities of God's presence at that moment. God needs our help too. Sometimes the only hindrance to God's saving action in the world is the lack of a faithful small response on the part of God's people.

Keeping dry. It is in the power of God. The story of God's people teaches us that when we cannot see a way out, God can make a way. Keeping dry. The story of God's people call us to be a participant in God's action by faithfully responding to God's intention for us.