# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Moses (part one)”**

**Exodus 14:10-14**

 **June 18, 2023**

This summer we are exploring stories of some of the Old Testament people of God, and this morning we take a closer look at the Exodus. The Israelites have been liberated from Egypt and have begun their journey through the wilderness. Pharaoh, however, begins having second thoughts about letting them go, and he decides to pursue them with his army in order to bring them back into slavery. Having been led by God to the shore of the Red Sea, Pharaoh believes the Israelites are trapped. We pick up the story in Exodus 14:10-14, and I invite you to turn there with me

As Pharaoh approached, the people of Israel looked up and panicked when they saw the Egyptians overtaking them. They cried out to the Lord, and they said to Moses, “Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren’t there enough graves for us in Egypt? What have you done to us? Why did you make us leave Egypt? Didn’t we tell you this would happen while we were still in Egypt? We said, ‘Leave us alone! Let us be slaves to the Egyptians. It’s better to be a slave in Egypt than a corpse in the wilderness!’” But Moses told the people, “Don’t be afraid. Just stand still and watch the Lord rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today will never be seen again. The Lord himself will fight for you. Just stay calm.”

All of us have experienced situations that seemed hopeless, where we felt overwhelmed by our circumstances and unsure what to do next. The Israelites were certainly in a tough place between the proverbial rock and hard place – between Pharaoh’s army and the Red Sea. And they did what most of us tend to do when facing seemingly insurmountable difficulties – they cried out in fear.

The emotion of fear is the common human response to circumstances beyond our control, and fear usually leads to one of two actions on our part: fight or flight. We either want to take on the negative situation by trying to fight our way to a better outcome, or we take flight and try to run away and hide, hoping things will get better if we just ignore them. Neither option seems a good idea for the Israelites. With the Red Sea blocking any realistic avenue of escape, Pharaoh’s army will annihilate them if they fight and it will chase them down if they take flight.

So, they blame God and they blame Moses for their predicament. Keeping a positive outlook is pretty hard when nothing much positive is going on in your life. Sometimes we just want to sink down into the depths of the unfairness of it all and dwell in it, wallow in it, and let it cover us, all the while blaming God and others for our hardships.

One of the greatest hymns of all time was written by a woman who knew lifelong adversity. “Just As I Am,” the hymn made famous by Billy Graham crusades when it was sung as people came forward to give their lives to Christ, was written by Charlotte Elliott. Charlotte had grown up bitter with God about the circumstances of her life. She was an invalid from her youth and deeply resented the constraints her handicap placed on her activities. In an angry outburst on one occasion, she expressed her feelings to a pastor visiting her home. He shared the gospel with her, encouraging her to have faith in God, to come to God just as she was, with her handicap and anger and fear about her future.

At first she resented the pastor’s response to her situation, but the Lord spoke to her through him, and she committed her life to God. While she slowly began to grow in her faith, she still found herself with doubts and struggles. Then one evening in 1836, she decided to write her spiritual autobiography in verse. Pouring her feelings out to God – feelings that countless individuals have identified with in the generations that followed – she penned the words to “Just As I Am.” The third verse, perhaps more than the others, described her walk with the Lord: “Just as I am, though tossed about; with many a conflict, many a doubt; fightings and fears within, without; O Lamb of God, I come! I come!”

When the children of Israel expressed their fear to Moses, he spoke to them and said: “Don’t be afraid.” Exchange faith for fear. Instead of fight or flight, be still. Instead of doing your thing when afraid, be still and let God do his thing. “The Lord himself will fight for you,” Moses said. “Just stay calm.”

It is in our nature to run from suffering, to fight against sorrow. We cry out to God, trying to make our case for why he should hear us and do what we want. Then, we shake our fist at God when he doesn’t do what we ask. This is who we are; this is “Just as I am.” And it is just as we are that God welcomes us. When the Israelites shook their fists at God, he didn’t abandon them. He parted the Red Sea for them and they walked safely through the Sea and into salvation from Egypt.

When the negative invades our lives, whether that be personal illness, a lifelong handicap or just plain bad circumstances, if we would be but still for a moment, perhaps we might hear that quiet, small whisper of hope that God speaks into the believer’s heart: “Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will help you. I will strengthen you. I will uphold you with my strong right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).