

Let's think about happiness this morning. Have you had a time in life when you were so elated, so joyful, so blessed that you just wanted to burst out in song? May be you did. You can't really carry much of a tune but you did it anyhow because your heart was just overflowing. Perhaps it was when a baby was born or when a doctor said "you are cancer free". Perhaps it was the moment when you first realized Jesus Christ had forgiven your sins. That is the place where this song of Moses and Miriam comes from. It is the oldest poem in the Bible. Faithful Jews recite this song every morning as part of their prayers. You have to remind yourself constantly that you have good reason to be happy. It is a song that Christian tradition includes on Easter Sunday worship. And it is the song we will be singing in heaven. Revelation 15:3 "And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying 'Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!'" As we sing this song we think of the great victory over death won by the resurrection. We have a reason to be happy every day!

It is a song of power. God has the power to work life even in the face of the determined forces of death in this world. There is a direct line from the Exodus victory to the Easter story. This is where the Jewish faith and the Christian faith are deeply connected by these two shock and awe producing events that demonstrate beyond all doubt there is a God whose power is beyond comprehension and who uses this power on behalf of the poor, the oppressed, the despairing, the broken and the dying. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!

I want you to note the pronouns of this song. They are personal: "I will sing...my strength...my song...my salvation...I will praise...I will exalt..." Do you have a personal relationship with God? Do you have a personal experience of his power? Is Christ in your heart as well as your head? It's been said that the longest journey in life is about 9 inches—the distance between your head and your heart. This song is not some academic paper cooked up by some intellectual in a library. This song springs out of the hearts of Moses and Miriam and all the people. It represents their real and personal experience of God.

In 2005 an Army reserve doctor Lt Col. Gary Morsch found himself serving in Iraq. It was Sunday morning. He was in the back of a Humvee transporting a very sick POW to the hospital. He was wearing 50 pounds of body armor. Next to him was a very nervous gunner with his head stuck out the top hatch pointing his machine gun at anything that moved and yelling at drivers and passersby. They were in a heavily armed convoy. The noise, the heat and the dust was unbearable. Dr. Morsch was scared, lonely and homesick "Why are we risking our lives for this enemy prisoner?" He decided to console himself by listening to some music on his iPod. His son-in-law had loaded 1000 songs onto it for him before he left the States. The first song he heard was from the Brooklyn Tabernacle choir: "Surely the presence of the

Lord is in this place. I can feel his mighty power and his grace. I can hear the brush of angel's wings. I see glory on each face. Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place." Dr. Morsch wrote:

I sensed the presence of God as never before. I felt enveloped by the presence of God—God around me, God above me, God in me. As tears ran down my dusty cheeks, I peered through the thick, bulletproof window at Iraqis in their flowing robes, their mud-walled houses, children at play, the tall and stately palm trees. And just as surely as I felt the presence of God in that Humvee, I sensed God's presence in all that I saw—here, in this desolate country, with the Shiites, the Sunnis, the Kurds. God was surely here. He loves Iraq. Then I thought of what this convoy was doing, and the words of Jesus came to me: "Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). I was filled with a deep sense of peace. I was still worried about the road ahead, but I had a sense of contentment that everything was going to be fine, no matter what happened. I knew that God profoundly loved every person on both sides of this war.

The song of Moses is a song of power. It is also a song of war—for God makes war upon the oppressive and sinful powers of this world. God should not be misunderstood. He does not wish anyone to die. He does not want a single sinner to be lost. Yet God will use force against the power of oppression—and this is not a concern for the oppressed!

The Civil War took the lives of 620,000 Americans. In the last days of the war, Richmond was captured by the Union Army. President Abraham Lincoln made a surprise visit. The slaves recognized him immediately and thronged around him in the streets. Lincoln stood up on a barrel and gave an impromptu speech. He said this: "My poor friends, you are free—free as air. You can cast off the name of slave and trample upon it .... Liberty is your birthright." The consciences of those freed were not at all troubled by the bloodshed for they knew that freedom is more precious than blood.

There are still powers and principalities at work in this world that oppress and impoverish people. Ephesians 6:12 says, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." What these powers produce is an international drug trade, an international terror network, a nuclear arms race, an international human trafficking industry, an expanding income gap between rich and poor, the destruction of civility, family life and human decency. The message to the rich and the hard-hearted and the greedy from God is this: "The way of the wicked will perish." Count on it for the Lord is at war with all the sources of oppression and abuse in this world.

It is a song of love—for God leads his people in steadfast love, "You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed." (15:13). This is a turning point in the song where the theme changes from power to love. Love upsets and overturns all of the power structures of this world. Humans exercise power like Pharaoh did. It is an opportunity to dominate, to coerce and to compel other people to do the will of the leader. Jesus recognized this abuse of power when he taught his disciples about leadership: "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over

them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant..." Jesus went on to use himself as the example of leadership, "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42-45)

God always leads with love. He took it upon himself to listen to the cries of the oppressed and the weak. He took it upon himself to demonstrate his compassion. He took it upon himself to win their hearts. He wanted them to be his children, not his slaves. The people willingly followed God right out of Egypt, through the Red Sea because they knew God loved them. Here's a thing parents quickly forget: your children actually want to please you. Nothing warms the soul of a child more than to know they've put a smile on Mom and Dad's face. Even when those children get to be 50 years old—it doesn't change. Yet many parents forget all this and attempt to motivate their children with threats, nagging, even insults. The children may comply for a bit but resentment soon comes to dominate the relationship. Lead your family with love like Jesus Christ leads the church! Take the time to listen to your children, to value your children, to share time with your children and they will be glad to follow your leadership.

It is a song about the future. The song invites us to march with God into the future he's planned for our world. Look at v 18, "The Lord will reign forever and ever." The Exodus is not over until God's eternal kingdom is established on earth. This is the grand vision of the book of Revelation, "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." (Rv 11:15)

Is there anyone left who believes that God is going to save the world? Is there anyone left who believes in the coming kingdom of God? Don't think I'm asking you to believe in the end of the world, I'm asking if you believe in the beginning of the world!

On Friday I had the distinct privilege of teaching 6 middle schoolers how to fly fish. Then I turned them loose to flail the waters of Harvey Lake. They stood on the sand and on the docks and cast. I waded out into the lake near the lily pads, I felt myself sinking into the mucky bottom. When the mire reached my knee, I knew it was time to get out of there. It sucked hard on my feet and I labored to free myself. I do not like the sinking feeling of muck beneath my feet. The mind craves a firm foundation to stand on. The world has many problems: health care, terrorism, nuclear weapons, racial tension and the environment. Each day we seem to sink a little further down. Where is there a firm place to stand? I declare it to you: the Kingdom of God is coming and He will reign forever and ever. With this certainty fixed in our hearts we can stand anywhere. To make it through this broken world, you have simply got to learn this song and start singing it. We believe in the final triumph of God over all human affairs.

