**SERMON 2-2-2020**

**EXODUS 14:15-31**

Faith is an adventure.

Faith is a way of life which involves trust in God.

Although living in faith often brings excitement and enthusiasm,

          obstacles frequently arise to test our faith leading to doubt and fear.

God calls us to walk by faith, not by sight.

Sight says, "We can't do it. We don't have the resources."

Faith says, "We can do it. God has the resources."

Faith is a journey which helps us to trust God.

It is learning to trust God in every situation.

But sometimes it is not easy.

The Israelites had endured nearly four centuries of oppression, and slavery,

          400 years of beatings and hard work.

Moses was sent to the people to convince them God had not forgotten them,

          and lead them from slavery to freedom.

But we humans are often filled with more doubts than belief.

We cling to what we know, what is familiar, rather than step out into the unknown.

God was determined to lead his people from slavery to freedom.

God unleashed a spectacle of might and power which brought a cruel pharaoh

          to his knees, and convinced the Israelites God really did care for them.

The plagues on Egypt revealed his mighty power,

          to pharaoh and to the Israelites.

The ten plagues convincingly showed the power of God.

The plagues overwhelmed the Egyptians both physically and economically.

But even more importantly they overwhelmed them spiritually.

The Egyptians worshiped and trust many Gods.

One by one, the plagues showed that the God of the Israelites

          was more powerful than all the Egyptian gods.

Each of the plagues targeted specific gods or goddesses of the Egyptians:

The plague on the Nile River opposed the Egyptians' river god.

The plague of flies scorned worship of the sacred fly.

The plague of darkness attacked the sun-god Ra.

The plague on livestock defied the sacred bull.

The plague of frogs targeted the god Heqt,

          a frog headed goddess representing resurrection.

The plague of boils targeted the physician god Imhotep, the god of medicine.

The god Seth, the god of the crops was targeted by the plague of locusts.

The final plague, the death of the firstborn sons,

          showed that God really was much stronger than the Egyptian god Bes,

          the protector of children and family.

God sent the plagues so both the Egyptians and the Israelites

          would know the power of Israel's God.

 And it worked.

The Egyptians became so convinced of God's power

          they let thousands of slaves leave,

          with the wealth of Egypt showered upon them as farewell presents.

The Israelites were so convinced,

          they left their home and history,

          and followed Moses into the desert and a new life.

The Hebrews had been delivered from the strong, oppressive hand of Pharaoh.

God brought them out of Egypt, the land of slavery and oppression.

They started their journey with high hopes and expectations,

          and headed toward the land of promise.

But they have marched only a few days,

          when they were suddenly stopped in their journey.

In front of them was the great Red Sea.

On each side of them was a mountain,

          and behind them were Pharaoh and his army closing in fast.

It appeared to the Israelites that they were hopelessly trapped.

There appeared to be no way out.

We have been there.

We have all been there.

Trapped by problems and catastrophes, sickness and death,

          lack of money, resources, strength, and solutions.

And there appears to be no way out.

In the midst of chaos and confusion, the people went to Moses

          and begin to cry out to him.

Moses didn't have any answers, so he did the only sensible thing.

He cried out to God: Lord, What do you want me to do?

          They are getting ready to stone me.

          What in the world do you want me to do?¨

God told Moses: Tell this people to start moving forward.

          Raise your staff and stretch it out toward the sea. You are going to move.

Moses obeyed and took the first step and did what God told him to do.

The winds began to blow and the waters began to roll back on each side.

The Israelites began to pass through the walls of water.

But the Egyptians were all killed as the waters flowed back into place.

When the Israelites were finally free of the oppression of the Egyptians,

          they knew God was the one who did it.

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

The pattern of dependence continues all through Exodus.

When the wilderness wanderers ran out of water, God provided.

When food supplies failed, God provided.

When raiders attacked, God provided.

Independence from Egypt meant dependence on God.

When we stop moving in the direction God wants us to go,

          then we start going backward.

We return to living in fear, and worry, and doubt, instead of faith and confidence.

At last the Hebrews were free.

They trusted God.

They were headed toward the Promised land.

And they danced and sang praises to God.

They rejoiced in their freedom.

As long as they were following God's instructions,

          they were full of faith, and everything was all right.

But it didn't last long.

As soon as they stopped going forward, their faith was replaced with fear.

Three days after the miraculous escape through the Red Sea,

          they were grumbling to Moses and God about water supplies.

A month or so later, when hunger pangs began to gnaw at them,

          they bitterly complained:

          "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt,

          when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought

          us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

God responded with a provision of manna which would continue for 40 years.

But the Israelites were soon grumbling about the water supplies again.

Forty years in the desert wilderness ought to have been an Adventure in Faith.

          Instead it became a difficult journey in fear.

Yet every instance of God's faithfulness

          seemed to summon up astonishing human unfaithfulness.

Exodus makes one thing clear.

The Israelites were not chosen

          because of their bravery, or strength, or even faithfulness.

Their selection was an act of God's pure grace.

No one else can take the credit.

Reading through the book of Exodus

          we begin to realize we are not any different from the Hebrews.

God does not choose us because of our courage, or strength.

God does not love us because of our faithfulness.

He loves us in spite of it all.

As He led the Hebrews to the Promised Land,

          He will lead us to be with Him, forever.

The journey will go much easier, and smoother,

          when we follow Him, trust him, and obey him.

AMEN