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Easter Day: Exodus 15 & Acts 2:22-32

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Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Exodus chapter 15. I'm going to read this to you. I'm going to read this to you.

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I'm going to read this to you. Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. And Miriam sang to them, Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they came to

Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah, because it was bitter.

Therefore it was named Marah. And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the Lord made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, saying, If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord your healer.

Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water. Exodus chapter 15 contains two great hymns of praise, the song of Moses and then the answering song of Miriam. In some respects the song of the sea could be compared to a sort of national anthem for Israel.

It declares the great event of salvation achieved at the Red Sea, the event in which the nation comes to its birth. Both of these songs, the song of Moses and the song of Miriam that answers, are preceded by a reference to God's great act of deliverance that has just occurred. In chapter 14 verses 28 to 29 and then in chapter 15 verse 19.

Moses and the people and then Miriam the prophetess singing to the women. It's an antiphonal song, a song and then an answering song. We can see this as part of the liturgy of a victory.

In 1 Samuel chapter 18 verses 6 to 7 we see the importance of songs in celebrating victory. It's part of the liturgical element associated with deliverance in this context. We can see a similar thing in the song of Deborah in the book of Judges.

It connects the Red Sea crossing with future events. The passing over of the Jordan, the planting of the land in verses 16 and 17. The song deals with these founding events of Israel as a nation.

And it's similar to the songs of deliverance that we might find in the Psalms. It's a sort of realised eschatology, an anticipation of what God is going to do for his people. God is creating a new heavens and a new earth.

And this drawing apart of the waters and the bringing up of his people from the waters is a new creation event. It's a testimony to God grounded in historical acts in which his character and his purpose are revealed. And the importance of the song more generally is seen in the fact that it's not just an ascent to truth.

It's a stirring of emotions and a declaration of God's glory from the very depths of the heart. It exists for the benefit of memory and memorialisation, for adoration and witness. The event of the Red Sea is often recounted in the Psalms and elsewhere in the prophets, a number of times in the book of Isaiah for instance.

It's God's declaration of his power, the decisive act by which in that final fell judgment, Israel is delivered from Egypt and established as a people. It establishes God's supremacy over the false gods as we see in verses 11 to 12. It proves God's faithfulness to his covenant.

It's an event producing responses, the praise of Israel, the overcoming and the humbling of his adversaries, the trembling of the oppressors and the wider world sees what God has done and it marvels. And there is a sort of deparicularisation. This song is not just about this specific deliverance in history.

It will be more generally sung of God's great works, of his victory over his enemies, not just over Egypt. Beyond their historical particularity, the Egyptians also stand for the chaotic forces of the world and all that might be arrayed against God. God's victory is of cosmic significance.

And in the book of Revelation we see once again the song of Moses being sung at the edge of a sea as God has delivered his people from a greater adversary. God is the warrior, God is the king, God fights with his very creation, with the winds, with the deep, with the sea, with the flood, with the earth. God wields nature itself against all of his adversaries.

And after this great song of praise, Israel finds itself in a place where there's no water to drink. The water of Mara is bitter and even after God's great deliverance that he has accomplished, at this place they wonder whether he will be able to provide. The Lord instructs Moses to cast a log into the water and when he does, the water is made sweet.

We've read a story similar to this. It's a story of water being transferred from one form to another. It's the story of the first plague where the water became blood.

The life-giving water at the heart of Egypt became undrinkable and polluting. And now we see that working the other way round. This event is an event where God demonstrates his power to heal.

Just as God has shown his power in destruction, in the plagues in Egypt, now he shows that he can heal and restore his creation and give life to his people. It's a time of testing and obedience but God heals and delivers his people. And he shows that just as in the plagues he demonstrated his power to bring death, his power is a power that will ultimately be seen most clearly in his ability to bring life.

This chapter ends with Israel encamped at Elim, a place with 12 springs and 70 palms. Numbers that would seem to be significant. 12 associated with Israel.

It's the number of Israel, the number of its tribes. 70 associated with the elders of Israel but also with the nations of the world. The story of the Red Sea crossing has often in the history of the church been looked to as a paradigm for thinking about the resurrection of

Christ.

The impassable obstacle has been opened up for us so that we should pass through death itself to a life beyond it on the other side. Our pursuers, Satan and his demons and all the forces of hell have been drowned in the depths. Christ has gone on ahead of us and led us through on dry land.

It's an event of rebirth. The story of the Exodus is a story of birth culminating in this deliverance through the sea. As a narrow passage is made for Israel to leave the womb of Egypt where they have been experiencing these birth pangs.

The story of birth and struggle in birth and Israel crying out in pain and God hearing. The story of people struggling to have children and those children being destroyed by Pharaoh. The story of dedicating the firstborn of the womb of Israel being God's firstborn son.

This is the birth event and Israel has been born through the sea. Christ is the firstborn from the dead. He is the one who opens up the womb of the tomb so that life might emerge from it.

It's a new creation. It's a time when land is brought out from the sea. A people drawn out of the waters.

It's when our great champion goes on ahead of us and we are brought into his life. Moses was first drawn out of the water in his birth. He lived out the history of Israel in advance and Israel entered into his story.

Afrhat the Syrian writing in the third century declared Moses divided the sea for them and had them cross it. Our Lord opened hell and broke its gates when he went down into its depths and opened them and marked out the path for those who come to believe in him. Christ in his death and his resurrection tore open the abyss of hell so that we might walk through on dry land.

And when this deliverance has been accomplished, to borrow the words of C.S. Lewis, death itself would start working backwards. The bitter waters of death are made sweet through the wood of the cross of the carpenter's son. Out of Christ's scented garden tomb flow the living waters of the Spirit which are for the healing of the nations.

The Lord is our healer. The Lord is our healer because of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The story of Exodus 15 ends with Israel encamped at Elam with 12 springs of water and 70 palm trees.

A spring for each of the tribes of Israel and a shade giving palm tree for each of the nations. His imagery from the temple. It's a temple in the wilderness, a dwelling place of God with his people, where his people find shade and rest, refreshment in all the

troubles and the difficulties around them.

They found some oasis of calm. And through the resurrection of our Lord, a new Elam is being established in the church. An Elam where Jew and Gentile are brought together, where those 12 springs and those 70 palms, that new temple imagery is established as a place of God's dwelling among us.

A new Garden of Eden. In Revelation chapter 7 verses 4 to 17 we meet another Elam. The imagery is all there.

Israel and the nations brought together. Water and salvation all in the shade of palm trees. And I heard the number of the sealed.

144,000 sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel. 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed. 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben.

12,000 from the tribe of Gad. 12,000 from the tribe of Asher. 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali.

12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh. 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon. 12,000 from the tribe of Levi.

12,000 from the tribe of Issachar. 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun. 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph.

12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed. After this I looked and behold a great multitude that no one could number. from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever. Amen. Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come? I said to him, Sir, you know.

And he said to me, These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple.

And He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. The sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to

springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. The risen Christ, the great Shepherd, come up from the deep of the grave, has delivered us from the ruler of this world and all His powers that pursue us, trampling down death by death, healing our diseases, and bringing us to His verdant oasis, where thirst is quenched and souls revived.

Acts chapter 2, verses 22 to 32. Men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know, this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him, I saw the Lord always before me, for He is at my right hand that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced.

My flesh also will dwell in hope, for you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life. You will make me full of gladness with your presence.

Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that He would set one of His descendants on His throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter preaches to the crowd that has gathered to see the spectacle of the disciples speaking in tongues. He declares the fact of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, divinely attested with mighty works, wonders and signs. His death divinely appointed by the determined plan and foreknowledge of God, and His resurrection divinely accomplished, as it was not possible for death to hold Him.

In Jesus God has bared His arm, demonstrating His power in miracles and great deeds, through His ability to use the actions of His adversaries to achieve His ends, and through the impotence of the grave to arrest Him. The very thing that the Jewish leaders presumed would destroy Jesus was the divinely intended means of His victory, determined in every particular beforehand. Peter quotes Psalm 16 verses 8 to 11, where David provides testimony for Peter's claim that Jesus is the Messiah.

These verses are also used by Paul in his sermon in Acts 13. Acts 13 verses 26 to 39 have pretty much the same pattern as Peter's Pentecost sermon, providing two examples of the message of the early church. Paul declares there, And we bring you the

good news that what God promised to the fathers, this He has fulfilled to us their children, by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, You are my son, today I have begotten you.

And as for the fact that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken in this way, I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David. Therefore He says also in another Psalm, You will not let your holy ones see corruption. For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption.

But he whom God raised up did not see corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Psalm 16, like many other passages used in the New Testament as witnesses to Jesus, is one that seems strange to us, it seems like an over-reading of the text.

However, such a way of reading was not unique to Christians, and some Jewish readings understood the meaning of the text to refer to the Messiah also, who would rise from David. Such an understanding emerges quite naturally from the promise of the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7, verses 12-16. The underlying themes are clear here.

David would descend to his grave and lie with his fathers, but David the dynasty, coming from his own body, would be raised up and endure forever. In Jesus, the son of David, David is raised up, as a dynasty and as a body. Jesus comes from the body of David.

Isaiah speaks of this in Isaiah 11, verses 1-10, speaking of a time when the Davidic dynasty, which has seemingly perished beyond all hope of return, buried in the grave of exile, would be raised up and would flourish, even from that which preceded David himself, cut down beyond David to Jesse. It would rise up from those roots. And a little child shall lead them.

The bold statements of Psalm 16 are but weakly fulfilled in the deliverances of David's own life. David seems to be speaking of a rescue from a far more terrible foe. If David the individual is the subject of this psalm, it is all very anticlimactic.

For all of its bold words, David lies dead in his grave. Yet when we read the psalm more closely, we might get a hint that it is about something greater, something much greater, about the body of the king in the fullest sense, about the dynasty that arises from his body, about the beautiful inheritance that God has determined for him. Knowing that God has promised him an everlasting kingdom, his psalm of praise speaks of something beyond merely the ways in which God delivered him from death on occasions in his own life.

It glorified God for his assurance of a dynasty arising from him that would not be ended by death, a dynasty secured in the raised body of Christ, the body of the son of David, also the political body of a people that participate in his life. Paul speaks about this in Romans chapter 1, verses 1-4. according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.

The grave eventually swallows all kingdoms and empires. Yet in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of David is raised, and a king who has conquered death itself is set on the throne, a king who has come from the body of David, a king who raises up the body of David, the man, and the body of David, the people. God's richest blessings to you all this Easter.