



Kevin Wright
Exodus 14:10-31
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“To be led and moved by the love of God, indifferent to everything except that. This is the source of the only true joy.” – Thomas Merton

The Israelites find themselves in a place far from joy. “Why have you brought us here?” they demand from Moses. “Were there not enough graves in Egypt?” As the sound of the Egyptian horses’ hooves hitting the desert sands fills the air, the Israelites enter into a state of ungratefulness and panic and rebel against Moses’ authority. Walter Wangerin Jr. describes the Israelites as being in between “swords and the sea” and in a place such as that, there is hardly room for joy.

The story turns on one key part, without which the narrative is robbed of its intrigue and excitement. The Lord led them there.

That’s right, it was the Lord who led the Israelites into that exact spot between the swords and the sea. And now God’s credibility is on the line. If God fails and the Egyptians massacre or enslave the Israelites, then God’s salvation is nothing more than a sham, a cheap infomercial promising the world but delivering only empty words. And so when the Israelites say, “Why have you brought us here?” they have every reason to ask that of the Lord because, well, the Lord was the one who brought them there.

Where are we in the story? I wish we were as wise as Moses, trusting confidently in God’s direction, the ever-steady leader with unswerving confidence in God. But sadly enough, I fear that you and I are often among the ranks of the Israelites, asking God why he has brought us to this place. “God, why did you lead me to Charlotte only to see my position at the bank let go?” “God, why did you call on me to give so much to your work when you knew the stock portfolio I depend on so much would evaporate?” God, why would you call our church to embrace this daunting strategic plan when you knew the times would be what they are?” And each question is followed by a correlative question, “What are we to make of God in all of this?”

In these times, our frenzied movement is met by the words of Moses to be still. In other words, chill out. For we know how the story ends, and what a spectacular ending it is. God makes a way. God splits the sea and with mighty winds makes a path for the Israelites to cross over to safety, out of the grip of the Egyptians. But even the deliverance of the Israelites is not without drama. For notice that it is before the sea is split that God commands the Israelites to move forward, and when the sea parts the Israelites move forward not knowing what is ahead and not knowing if the walls of water will collapse upon them. But they are told to move forward and move they must.

This past week saw the passing of a great man, Millard Fuller, the founder of Habitat for Humanity. Fuller and his family began Habitat in the 1970s after a time of domestic

turmoil. Although he had become a self-made millionaire by age 29, his personal life was in shambles. So he sold his possessions and followed God to the most unlikely of places, the Koinonia farm in the dusty fields of Americus, Ga. And there, Fuller and his family came into contact with a community of faith, and out of those experiences Fuller realized that God was calling him to build houses for the poor. And now, almost 40 years later, more than 300,000 houses have been built due to one man following God to a dusty farm in Georgia, not knowing what was ahead, simply walking by faith. Millard Fuller felt that God was calling him to move, and move he did.

The Charlotte Observer this past week reported that over 50 percent of students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools are living in poverty. And when Marian Wright Edelman was in Charlotte this week, she shared that out of the African American kids in our school system, one in three will be incarcerated during their lifetime. As these statistics and realities overwhelm us, God has called us to walk a very difficult path. God has called us to not simply turn our heads away, to not simply say, "Oh that's terrible, but it's someone else's problem," but to engage the issue of education in Charlotte and see to it that these statistics are eradicated and that these children who were once destined for incarceration make it to college and beyond.

When God opens a pathway, you walk through it.

This is a journey of joy. God has called us to be led and moved by his love. Let us walk through this path that God has laid out for us.