



“Showing the Way”

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Scripture (CEV):

Exodus 14:19-31

¹⁹ All this time God’s angel had gone ahead of Israel’s army, but now it moved behind them. A large cloud had also gone ahead of them, ²⁰ but now it moved between the Egyptians and the Israelites. The cloud gave light to the Israelites, but made it dark for the Egyptians, and during the night they could not come any closer.

²¹ Moses stretched his arm over the sea, and the LORD sent a strong east wind that blew all night until there was dry land where the water had been. The sea opened up, ²² and the Israelites walked through on dry land with a wall of water on each side.

²³ The Egyptian chariots and cavalry went after them. ²⁴ But before daylight the LORD looked down at the Egyptian army from the fiery cloud and made them panic. ²⁵ Their chariot wheels got stuck,^[a] and it was hard for them to move. So the Egyptians said to one another, “Let’s leave these people alone! The LORD is on their side and is fighting against us.”

²⁶ The LORD told Moses, “Stretch your arm toward the sea—the water will cover the Egyptians and their cavalry and chariots.” ²⁷ Moses stretched out his arm, and at daybreak the water rushed toward the Egyptians. They tried to run away, but the LORD drowned them in the sea. ²⁸ The water came and covered the chariots, the cavalry, and the whole Egyptian army that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them was left alive. ²⁹ But the sea had made a wall of water on each side of the Israelites; so they walked through on dry land.

³⁰ On that day, when the Israelites saw the bodies of the Egyptians washed up on the shore, they knew that the LORD had saved them. ³¹ Because of the mighty power he had used against the Egyptians, the Israelites worshiped him and trusted him and his servant Moses.

Footnote:

14.25 *stuck*: The Samaritan Hebrew text and two ancient translations; Hebrew “came off.”

Sermon:

This past week I was grieved to hear about five teenaged football players in Creston, IA who were photographed wearing KKK hoods with a burning cross and a Confederate flag, and who then shared that photo and video on social media. Then, their football coach kicked them off the team, the harshest discipline that he could consider.

Week before last, I learned that the devastating fire that has consumed the Columbia River Gorge was started by teenagers, boys and girls, who threw a firecracker into the dry gorge, laughing when they did so, filming it, showing it to others on social media. They are now being prosecuted for the enormous destruction of that fire.

On Wednesday, a 15-year old boy went into Freeman High School and began shooting. Now, tiny Rockford, WA is reeling with the death of one boy, the suffering of the three wounded girls, the fear that this school shooting has caused. All of District 81 schools in Spokane went into immediate lock down that day, and that, too, causes anxiety and fear.

Now, we all have had different reactions to these events. Some shake their heads, some worry about the lack of morals and values, some seek retribution, many are dumbfounded.

I know that I personally felt as if I couldn't face one more terrible thing happening... I wanted to hide my head in the sand.

We can consider "what is wrong with kids today", until we are blue in the face.
Not good enough.
Nope.

Or, we can admit that it is our job, as adult human beings, to show our younger people, how one lives in the world.

It isn't the job of teachers, and counselors. Well, it isn't just their job. Nor can it just be the job of the parents, because, as we well know... sometimes they are not up to it, sometimes they are absent, or abusive, addicted, or just gone.

Don't get me wrong. There are loving families of every sort, and wonderful young people doing their best at being strong, loving human beings; growing up wonderful, creative, brave and kind.

But there is clearly suffering out there.
And ignorance, and cruelty. Blindness and selfishness.

We must show others the way that God leads us along...the path of peace, the path of care for all creation, the path of justice for all people. The courage that is needed to speak up, stand up to your peers with the firecracker, or the ones with hoods and burning crosses.

I know you do this in your own lives. I know you strive to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God. Especially with your families, your neighbors, your grandkids, and nephews and nieces.

But what about the kids across the street, over at Lewis and Clark High School? What about the nameless kids at Sacajawea Middle school? Or Central Valley H.S.?

If we are to end school shootings, end callous disregard for human dignity, or the integrity of the creation...we will have to do something beyond legislating guns, or prosecuting thoughtless teenagers who throw cherry bombs into a dry forest.

We have to show them the way.

We have to offer them kindness and discipline, a listening ear, a modeling of love and care and welcome, and knowledge of the face of justice, and personal responsibility for life and beauty.

We have to show it to them. We have to model it, live it for them.

For teenagers. And from them, to everyone.

We were all teenagers once, we were all somewhere between childhood and adulthood, and there were messages and role models who helped us become.

Today's text is exactly that, if we get beyond our visions of Charlton Heston as old man Moses. (Ugh!)

We have no idea how old Moses was, he could have been a young and vital man when he took on his job of leadership and freedom fighter for the Hebrew slaves.

We know for sure that the way the fleeing slaves acted was like a bunch of scared kids and whiny teens.

Moses had to show them, repeatedly, that God has a way in the wilderness, that learning God's design for life is learning to live a way of trust, joy, possibility, responsibility and community. Learning to grow up to the fullness of adult life, a human life, well-lived and lived in community of hope and care, with wisdom and self-discipline, justice and mercy.

Recently, I listened to Christa Tippet interview Junot Diaz, in her podcast, *On Being*. Mr. Diaz was brilliant and moving as he spoke of the experience of blackness, and of hope. He

believes that memory can help sustain hope, memory and story. The memories we have of people in our families and communities who have been strong, and brave, loving and true. Their stories keep us going; their stories sustain our hope and our lives.

My father once told the story of a pilgrimage and a protest to the Pope in Rome that he took when he was a teenager in Nazi Germany. When he and his companions crossed back into Germany, they were stopped and strip-searched and questioned. It had to have been very scary. My dad knew it was going to get worse, and he began to prepare himself for that. He continued to speak out against the Nazi presence in town, and his parents were warned...either get him out of town or he would end up in prison. They pulled strings to get him out of Germany, but right til his ship sailed for Canada, my dad knew the government of Hitler was looking for him. He was 17, and he never saw his father again. He didn't get back to his family for over 20 years.

This is a story of courage that I grew up on. We have such stories, and they are life-giving stories. We have stories to tell, and stories to hear, from our young.

If I don't start right here, with these teens, and these toddlers, I am burying my head in the sand.

We are called to show our children, our toddlers and babies and teens, the way of life and hope, the way of love and service, the way of respect and welcome...that is the way Jesus modeled, that is the way of fullness of life for human beings.

Otherwise, the school shootings will continue, and the bullying and the hate will continue, the senseless violence will continue.

And if we blame our young, then we are lying to ourselves, and burying our heads in the sand.

We need to live in hope, and share hope; tell the stories of making it through, tell the stories of those who made it to joy, through hardship into adulthood and a life worth living.

Our bible tells such stories.

Moses and the fleeing slaves are such a story.

We have such stories.

Let us tell those stories, now and always.