



# GPS GUIDE: OCTOBER 3, 2021

## Grow. Pray. Study

**Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Sermon: God Saves**

### **Exodus 1:8-12, 15-17, 22**

**8** Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. **9** He said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. **10** Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” **11** Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. **12** But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. **15** The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, **16** “When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.” **17** But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. **22** Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.”

### **Exodus 2:1-10**

**2** Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. **2** The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. **3** When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. **4** His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. **5** The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. **6** When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said. **7** Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” **8** Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. **9** Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. **10** When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, “because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

### **Monday: Read Isaiah 51:1-8**

Large transitions disorient us. Moving, changing jobs, personal transitions...all of these mix up our lives by taking us out of our patterns. Such transitions are all the more disorienting when they are forced upon us. When we have no say in the sudden disruptions that life can bring, disorientation is worsened by loss, remorse, confusion, or anger. The Israelite exile is a forced change. Forced mass migration to Babylon brought disorientation. After the forced exile and changes brought on by Covid-19 we all have a little more understanding of what our ancient siblings might have felt during their exile. Isaiah 51 falls within Isaiah’s powerful pastoral sermon to bring comfort and hope to a community struggling to recover from mass exile. The prophet’s job is to heal the wounds of unwanted disorientation. In verses 6-8 the prophet tells the exiles to look up “to the heavens,” to look down “at the earth beneath,” and to look around at their oppressors. These things may look

permanent — and they have in fact been there for billions of years — but they aren't. Human beings have never known life without the earth, but it will pass away. The taunts of the oppressors seem like they will last forever — but they won't. In contrast, the Lord says, "My salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended." Sometimes it might seem like oppressors or pandemics or the vary gates of hell will have the last word in our world. But the prophet's promise is that they will not! God's salvation and deliverance do come! God's salvation and deliverance will prevail! God's salvation and deliverance will never end! So the prophet calls on the exiles — and the prophet calls on us too through this sermon— to look back, to look up, to look down, and to look around in order to find reasons to look ahead to God's deliverance that is surely coming. When you look around where do you see signs of God's deliverance? Where do you feel God's salvation that outlasts any despair?

*Prayer: I need reminders of your abiding presence and your promise of deliverance, O God. Keep my eyes open to look all around for your saving work in the world. Amen.*

### **Tuesday: Read Psalm 138**

This psalm of thanksgiving — one of those songs that was composed after its author had come through a rather tight scrape — offers praise to the Lord in response to an experience of deliverance. The poet had experienced what the psalms often call "a day of trouble," a "day of disaster," or a "day of distress" — some really tough times. The term "day of trouble" is intentionally vague. It can refer to times of physical illness, spiritual struggle, financial peril, military threat, and the like. The psalms also call these times of crisis a "day when I call" because times of crisis are also times of prayer — moments when a suffering person or people "cry out" to the Lord in despair. And that is the point that is made in this psalm. The psalmist says, "On the day I called, you answered me." Having come through the time of trouble — or, more correctly, having been brought through the time of trouble by the grace of God — the psalmist now thinks of the dark valley through which he walked no longer as the time of trouble, but as the time when he called out and when God answered. If one were to boil down the theological witness of the Book of Psalms to one phrase, it would be this: The Lord is faithful. The two terms — steadfast love (Hebrew, *hesed*) and faithfulness (Hebrew, *'emet*) — describe God's character. It is a character that is trustworthy, which means that the promises God makes can be trusted. Which means that the guidance and providence that the Lord offers are better for us in the long run than our own wills for our own lives. The psalmist's experience of God's help has reminded her that she is not the captain of her own soul, that he is not the master of his own fate — and that this is a good thing! Some people reject the offer of help from outside themselves, because they do not want to be weak, to need help, or to admit their limits. Biblical faith starts with admitting our own weakness, our own sin, our own limits — and of accepting the gracious mercy and fidelity of the Savior who comes among us to serve rather than to be served. The psalm ends with a request for continued help: Do not forsake the work of your hands. Each of us is the work of God's hands. And to be a follower of the Lord means to know that we can not and need not do it all on our own. Do you have a tendency to think that asking for help is weakness? How might this psalm redirect your thinking? Where do you need God's saving work in your life right now? Try asking for God's help today and know that God is faithful and trustworthy.

*Prayer: I need you, Lord. Deliver me and offer me your salvation. Amen.*

### **Wednesday: Read Matthew 16:13-20**

Today's reading is only half of a whole story. If you read on through verses 21-23 you will notice that right after Peter's confession, upon which Jesus calls him the rock of the church, Jesus then calls Peter a stumbling block for not recognizing the powerful truth of what Jesus will sacrifice to bring about God's kingdom. I will say that it's really hard for me to read the praise and affirmation of Peter apart from the reversal and rebuke as he gains far more insight into the depth and cost of his confession. Then again — reading this text alone makes me rethink my assumptions. It occurs to me that this pause to recognize Peter's confession might be important for us to consider in its own

right. Peter will go on to completely misunderstand what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah, he will resist Jesus' intention to turn himself over to the authorities, and he will eventually deny and desert his Lord. But for now... for now, in just this moment, he confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. And that's something for which to give thanks! There is so much going on in the world that needs our effort, passion, and commitment. We are being called, individually and communally, to confess Christ and carry out his saving love — in both word and deed. At one and the same time we that know there is so much more to do than we seem able to do and that we fall short, not living as deeply or truly into our confession as we should. At times we, like Peter, get confused or scared about what that confession means. And yet there are moments when we confess, when we do something right, when we perceive more of God's saving purpose than previously, when things come together if only briefly, and when we sense God's spirit at work in us and among us. And at those moments, it makes sense to pause and give thanks. One of the key lines in reading this familiar passage is Jesus' additional declaration about Peter's confession: "Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven" (v. 17). God was at work in Peter. Yes, he would screw up mightily, but in this moment God was at work — and God would be at work later, too! And that is always cause for celebration and thanksgiving. As you look around and see what is going right now, where do you see God at work? Where can you celebrate God's saving grace in your life? How can we as a church more fully participate in bringing God's kingdom love to our part of the world?

*Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for not giving up on us. Continue to save us so we might be your love made known in the world today. Amen.*

### **Thursday: Read Luke 5:17-26**

Four friends brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus because they had heard about his ability to save. They couldn't get access to the home where he was preaching but their persistence finally paid off when they dug a hole in the roof and lowered their friend right in front of Jesus. Jesus said, "The Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth." And as the proof, he performed the very earthy miracle of a physical healing. "Stand up," he said to the paralytic, "take your mat, and go to your home." Rev. Reggie Weaver in his sermon *When the Roof Crumbles* asks this important question: Why did the roof have to crumble in the first place? He goes on to answer: That paralyzed man and his friends had been physically crowded out, which is surprising to me. I assume they tried to enter through the main passageways, and I was taught that when you see someone who might need a little extra time to get in, then you clear out a little space, even help them if you can. But, apparently in this passage, the people inside did not or would not make room for him. I wonder if we might look around and say, "Well, we don't have that problem here. If someone wants to come, there is a place for them here. They can even have a whole pew if they want." But empty seats don't mean that we have made room for them. Because there are other ways of crowding people out. Rev. Weaver says that too often the church can crowd people out by developing cultures where we always lament, "Well, we could be more effective, if we only had more people," but then silence the voices and the fresh ideas of the new people who walk through our doors. We can crowd people out by spending more time and energy on in-house conversations designing ways to preserve our past structures and traditions than we do discerning what the gospel needs to look like in the here and now. What if Mark isn't only demonstrating Jesus' power to save in this story, but warning us that if the structures we build are so narrow that they do not allow people access to the grace and the healing that God has to offer then those structures must be altered. Sometimes the roof has to crumble before we can see what the Church is supposed to be. Like the friends of the paralytic, sometimes it is our job to carry one another with the strength of our own faith. I wonder if part of what it means to live in faith is to remember that it is our job to empower others to experience and participate in the saving work of Jesus through the example of our own witness. Have you ever been like the paralytic - in need of something that you could not attain for yourself? Who was it that helped you gain access to the healing or forgiveness you needed? How can we as a congregation open our access more fully to others who long to experience the saving acts of Christ?

*Prayer: Saving God, give us the faith of those friends who risked so much to bring another to Jesus. Amen.*

**Friday: Read John 11:1-45**

I have many bibles in my office and love to read a variety of translations. When it comes to this story I always go back to the King James Version. Jesus, after weeping and being emotionally moved, commands those around him to open Lazarus' tomb. There's instant protest. Lazarus had been dead for a few days, and everyone knew that rolling that stone away wouldn't be pretty. Martha calls out: But Lord, he stinketh! There's just something so descriptive about that language. John is the Gospel of Signs. There are seven signs, and the raising of Lazarus is that ultimate seventh sign, revealing Jesus' identity as the Christ. Father Rick Morley says, ...as much as this sign is about Jesus, it's also about us. Because we are all Lazarus. We are all dead and lifeless. We are all wrapped up corpses, bound in the grave clothes which the world lays on us. We are stiff and we have all begun to smell a little rank. In other words - We stinketh. Until...

Until Jesus calls us out of the tomb. Until he orders everything that binds us and holds us down, to be stripped off of us and tossed aside. Until he breathes his holy breath into us again and makes us a new creation. Until Jesus calls us out, frees us, and gives us life.

The raising of Lazarus isn't just a miracle that Jesus performed thousands of years ago in a land far, far away. It's the work of Jesus today. And I'm glad that Jesus still calls us out, because I still need it. I still find myself from time to time bound up and wound up by things that keep me from living the fullness of life that God intends - bound up by the expectations of others, by my own worries and insecurities, by my sin. But the promise of the story of Lazarus is that, like Lazarus, Jesus loves us. He weeps for us. He is deeply moved by us. And he brings life to our death, freedom to our bondage, a shining light to our every darkness. What is it that has you bound up? Are there places in your life that feel dead and lifeless? What keeps you from experiencing newness of life? In those places in your life can you hear Jesus calling you out of the tomb? Loving you deeply? Offering you new life?

*Prayer: Bring me new life and opportunity, Lord, so that I can live in the fullness of your love. Amen.*

**Saturday: Read Luke 23: 26-49**

Do you ever wish you could have a second chance? A second chance to say something different - or maybe not say something. A second chance to repair a relationship or make the most of an opportunity? A second chance to follow through on a responsibility you avoided? In Luke's depiction of the crucifixion (Lk. 22:14-23:56) notice just how many second chances there are. The obvious one, of course, is that Jesus forgives those who crucify him - all those who crucify him - the active participants and passive bystanders alike. And then there's the thief, who names his own sins and yet then asks to be remembered, to have a second chance, and receives Jesus' promises that he will join him in paradise. But that's not all. Earlier in the story Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him and told him he would have a second chance to return and strengthen the other disciples (Luke 22:31-32). And then there's Barabbas who is also given a second chance when he is released in Jesus' stead (23:18-25). Later, the centurion who put him to death will seize the second chance offered and declare Jesus innocent, and all the world will receive another chance to encounter God personally and directly as the curtain in the Temple separating the ordinary people from God's most holy presence is torn in two (23:44-49). This is one of the key themes of Jesus' death and resurrection: not simply that we have a second and final chance but rather that we always have available to us another opportunity for life, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Jesus' death ushers in a new realm and order altogether where death does not have the last word and where our mistakes and regrets no longer define us. Are there things for which you long to have a second chance to get right? Isn't grace amazing after all? It is offered to all of us. Through his sacrificial actions Christ saves us and offers us new life. Thanks be to God! What will you do with your second chances?

*Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for second chances! May I use my second chances to bring glory to you. Amen.*