



Sermon, February 19, 2017
 Rev. Dr. Craig S. Pesti-Strobel
 Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

Sermon Series: Where Do We Go from Here?
“Separation”

As you listen to the scripture reading, listen for the **Strengths** and **Weaknesses** the Hebrew slaves possess at that moment, along with the **Opportunities** and **Threats** present. List these in this table:

Strengths:	Weaknesses:
Opportunities:	Threats:

Scripture: Exodus 14:5-20 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

⁵ When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the minds of Pharaoh and his officials were changed toward the people, and they said, “What have we done, letting Israel leave our service?” ⁶ So he had his chariot made ready, and took his army with him; ⁷ he took six hundred picked chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. ⁸ The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt and he pursued the Israelites, who were going out boldly. ⁹ The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots, his chariot drivers and his army; they overtook them camped by the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

¹⁰ As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. ¹¹ They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” ¹³ But Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. ¹⁴ The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.”

¹⁵ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. ¹⁶ But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷ Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. ¹⁸ And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.”

¹⁹ The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. ²⁰ It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

Opening joke: Frog, Fortune Teller, and the Future

Fortuneteller, gazing into crystal ball, to frog: "You are going to meet a beautiful young woman. From the moment she sets eyes on you she will have an insatiable desire to know all about you. She will be compelled to get close to you—you'll fascinate her." Frog: "Where am I? At a singles club?" Fortuneteller: "Biology class."

Sometimes it is better to remain ignorant of what the future has in store for us. On the other hand, glimpsing what bright possibilities the future holds can help us put up with our present situation in the hope of it unfolding into something far better. In today's scripture reading, the Israelites facing the charge of pharaoh's chariots on one side and a wide body of water on the other probably a lot like the frog in our opening story.

Share SWOTs of the Exodus story

As you listened to this morning's scripture reading, what did you pick up doing a SWOT analysis? (*Congregational response.*)

The future can be fearful going forward into uncertain times. Just listen to what they say: "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."

I want to tell you something I believe. I believe that we are in a very significant time in human history. I believe that we are on the verge of a massive unfolding of human hearts and minds. 500 years ago, European culture and Western Christendom underwent a tremendous Reformation that set the stage for a change in human civilization that was unprecedented. I believe, and I'm not alone in this belief, that we are in the beginning stages of what I call a Great Transformation. 500 years ago was the Reformation, 500 years later, the Great Transformation. I believe that churches are going to transform from being business-like institutions into communities of people being transformed heart and mind

“Separation”

by faith, and by deep and abiding relationships with the spiritual reality that is God. I believe people’s hearts will be cracked open by love in ways we have only glimpsed before. I believe that as people walk the path of faith, their minds and consciousness will move into having the Mind of Christ, as Paul sings about in Philippians, and this Mind of Christ will remove from our little minds the prejudices and bigotry we struggle under now, the materialistic worship of money that cripples our souls, the paralyzing inability to truly see that we are one human family loved equally by the same eternal and ever-surprising God. That is our Promised Land.

But right now we are like the Israelites facing down Pharaoh’s chariots, with what looks like an impassable body of water ahead of us. We want to cling on to the old life, the old Egypt. But in order to move into the Promised Land of what God is starting to raise up across the globe, we need to leave behind many of the things that have seemed precious to us, or that served us well for a while, but won’t work in the Promised Land.

What is our future?

SWOT analysis of what lies before us as a faith community: Group Reflection

- What are the **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities** and **Threats (SWOT)** facing us today?
- What do we hope to become?

Strengths:	Weaknesses:
Opportunities:	Threats:

(Introduce joint survey with FLC)

Closing story of the map

What do we hope to become? How do we hope to affect the world at large through what we create and do here in our own community? How will we be a part of a larger transformation?

Notice the words of Moses: “Do not be afraid.” The words of the Lord: “Go forward. Hold up your staff. I will part the waters.” There is always great fear in going forward. That is why continually in scripture we find the words, “Do not be afraid, I am with you.” (Ref: David Haas song, “You Are Mine,” FWS # 2218.) But also notice the words, “Go forward.” Our faith, based in loving obedience, is a faith that goes forward, into new territories, new understandings, new ways of doing things, new relationships.

An interesting map is on display in the British Museum in London. It's an old mariner's chart, drawn in 1525, outlining the North American coastline and adjacent waters. The cartographer made some intriguing notations on areas of the map that represented regions not yet explored. He wrote: "Here be giants," "Here be fiery scorpions," and "Here be dragons." Eventually, the map came into the possession of Sir John Franklin, a British explorer in the early 1800s. Scratching out the fearful inscriptions, he wrote these words across the map: "Here is God."

What have we scrawled across the maps of our future? My suggestion: let's write in bold print: “Here be God!”