

“A Way”

A sermon by the Reverend Joe Genau
for Edgewood Presbyterian Church

Exodus 14:5-7, 10-14, 21-29; Isaiah 12

October 14, 2018

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost/Baptism of Reilly Elizabeth Kane

Imagine the sense of chaos, the rollercoaster ride of emotions that the Israelites must have felt. Imagine the confusion. They have been set free. Then, suddenly, there is an army on their heels. And it's not your run-of-the-mill army, it's an army of chariots and war horses — power and speed and muscle and tyranny coming right at them, a hapless group of laborers and families and flocks on foot. There is no way out. They are trapped between Pharaoh and the sea.

They cry out. I love how, with absolute obliteration approaching, they find time to be sarcastic with Moses: “What, there were no graves in Egypt?” The people wish they had just stayed in slavery, deciding quickly that Moses will go down as one of those spectacularly failed revolutionaries.

Moses tells them to not be afraid, to shut their mouths and stay still and see what God will do. Moses stretches his hand out, and God divides the water — just like at the beginning of Genesis, God divides the water to create life. The people move into the dry seabed. Somehow, there is a way. The waters form walls and there is a way forward. A way out. A way to a future. A way to life. A way that doesn't include the Egyptian empire, whose army is drowned as they discover this way wasn't for them.

The title “Exodus” comes from Greek. It means “going out” or “a way out.” This whole book is centered around God bringing the people up out of Egypt, out of oppression. They wander for the rest of the book, arguing with God and making idols and receiving the Ten Commandments and the rest of the law and building the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle. But they don't get where they're going. That's a story for another book. This is the story of the way through the chaos and confusion, the way out of the Egyptian culture of death, the way to freedom, the way through the water that God made so that the people might become who they were created to be.

Things will not suddenly be easy for the Israelites. But here, at this pivotal moment, God made a way to new life — new life in blessing, new life in hope, new life in relationship, new life in flourishing.

Life is pretty excellent for Reilly Elizabeth Kane right now. Mom and Dad and their beloved family make sure she's well-fed and clean and comfortable and adored. She's got an amazing big sister in Nora. She's got her fans, who can't wait to hold her and tell her how sweet she is. She is surrounded on all sides by love. She's nowhere near having chariots from the west and the turbulent sea to the east.

But we know that, eventually and for every one of us, life gets hard. There are disappointments and frustrations. Relationships of all sorts are tricky. Pain happens and suffering happens and plain old bad luck happens. We are mortal, finite creatures and so our bodies betray us. Pharaoh is long gone, but the world remains broken. Reilly — just like every one of us who comes into this world — will need a way.

I have good news and better news to share with you this morning.

The good news is that God always makes a way, and that the way has been made for Reilly.

The better news — and it is my deep privilege to tell you this, parents, and grandparents, and family

and friends and members of Edgewood Presbyterian Church — the better news is that, in Christ Jesus, You Are That Way.

This isn't just true for Reilly, of course. It's simply that we're celebrating it for her today. It's true for all of our kids. And all of our adults. And for all of our *ooooold* people. For every person who lifts their head to say, "God is my strength and my might; God has become my salvation" you, the people of God, are the way that God has made.

You are the way.

You are the path through the sea. You are how the waters get divided so new life can emerge.

You are the escape from encroaching horses.

You are the answer to certain doom.

You are the way into new life in blessing, new life in hope, new life in relationship, new life in flourishing.

You do not and cannot do this alone, of course, just as Moses couldn't have made a ripple in that sea without God. The Way for us is Christ, whose claim on Reilly's life we enact and mark today.

Through him, you are the way that this child and every child of God you encounter will experience God's freedom.

Through you, God brings forth blessing for this child — blessing her to bless others.

Through you, she will find a way forward when it seems there's no way out.

You will be her teachers. You will be her collaborators. You will be her coconspirators for Spirit-led acts of grace and unbound joy. You will be the artists who show her beauty and you will be the muses that inspire her creativity.

You will be the bright, blinking neon sign directing her back to her beloved family and over to the wise elders and always pointing to Jesus when she needs to find her way.

You will be the music in her soul. You will be the voice in her ear.

You will be the memories in her heart.

You will be the ones she will watch to see how people should carry themselves and behave and treat others as they make their way along the path.

Again, this is true for Reilly. And it is true for every other person in this room. And it is true for those who have rested among us and moved on in to other lands. And it is true for the saints who have joined the great cloud of witnesses who are present today as we invoke God's Holy Spirit to bless this child through all time and all places.

In a few minutes, we will all make promises. Specifically, I'll ask y'all: "Do you, as members of the church of Jesus Christ, promise to guide and nurture Reilly by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging her to know and follow Christ and to be a faithful member of his church?"

I hope we can all be thinking about our answer to that question before it arrives. Could there be a more sacred vow? Could there be a vow more deeply needed in our world today?

For every person here that has been baptized, someone made that promise. And the Church treats those promises as binding beyond the particular people gathered in a particular place on a particular day. So if we make that promise for Reilly today, we are making it on behalf of Christians around the world and far into the future. So that when she is a wrinkly old lady, the promise we made on October 14, 2018 will bind the people around her to surround her with word and deed and love and prayer and encouragement to match our commitment today. In the same way, we are bound to keep the promises

made when our neighbors were baptized — whether it was last year, last century, in a church far across the sea, or at this very font.

Today we make sacred promises through water to live into the covenant that God has made. God claims us by name, and Christ marks us as his own. We welcome a new member to the family, celebrating overflowing grace and love. We ask God to show us the path and we humbly relish the call to nurture new life and to share the way of discipleship.

Inevitably, we'll goof. We won't be perfect guides and companions and leaders and parents and grandparents and pastors and teachers and friends. When that happens, we'll return to this water and we'll give deepest thanks for salvation and liberation and for a God who always, always makes a way. Amen.