

## **From Passover to Praise Easter Sunday**

### **Exodus 15 and Matthew 28:1-10 by Patty Friesen (April 16/17)**

The Song of Moses and Miriam is one of the oldest, most radical and most important songs in the Old Testament. It not only sounds the crucial themes of Israel's most elemental faith but it also provides a shape and sequencing of their faith, the distinctive articulation of the story of liberation. Verse 1 by Moses is apparently a quotation from the older independent song of verse 21 by Miriam and all the women. Miriam and the women were the first witnesses to the salvation of the Israelites as were Mary Magdalene and the women in Matthew's gospel, the first witnesses to the resurrection.

This song of deliverance uses a series of first-person pronouns to draw close and person to Yahweh in adoration and allegiance; Yahweh my strength, my song, my deliverance, my God. The singers know that all of life is owed to this one who will be lifted up and enthroned in the act of praise.

The body of the song retells the dangerous, hard fought conflict with Pharaoh and chaos and death and primordial waters before creation. It's not an easy victory but slavery is banished and chaos is eliminated. Who is like Yahweh? There are no rivals that come close to this God who is a majestic safe place for God's people. Their initial cry for help has become a shout of joy.

Exodus 2:24, "Out of their slavery, their cry for help rose up to God. God heard their groaning and God remembered the covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God looked upon the children of Israel and God knew their condition." In this one verse we have the clearest picture of what the God of Exodus and the God of the risen Christ might

be like. God hears, God remembers, God looks and God knows. Our first introduction to the God of Exodus is a picture of a God with very human characteristics. This is a God with ears and eyes, who can hear and see and remember and know or identify with. This is a God with a very intimate relationship with the world and with the people in it. This God has compassion on people and knows what is going on with them.

In Hebrew, the verb to “know” is y’dah and it is used when there is emotional vulnerability and sexual intimacy between people. It is almost an embarrassingly tenderness of God. So for God to y’dah Israel’s condition, suggests that God really knows the suffering of the people, knows intimately as if it were happening to God’s own self. Old Testament scholar, Terence Fretheim says, “God is internally related to the suffering of people, entering fully into the oppressive life situation and making it God’s own. For God to know suffering – is to allow suffering to enter deeply into the divine being. God is a suffering God and later in Christ, we meet a God who embodies suffering, who is a person of sorrow and well acquainted with grief.”

The God of Exodus knows suffering because God self-describes as a human parent. Exodus 4:22: “Tell Pharaoh, Israel is my first born son. Let my son go that he might worship me.” God identifies as a parent because there is nothing like parenting to teach you suffering! God wants Israel to know her as a parent and gives them access to her name in chapter 3, the name: I am who I am. Perhaps not the most helpful of names but this strange name I am adds to the mystery of the God of many names. The verb in Hebrew I am, can be past, present and future, meaning, I am what I was in the past. I am what I will be in the future. In effect, you will find out who I am. I am who I am as I walk with you through the deliverance from Egypt, through the crossing of the Red Sea

and through 40 years in the wilderness. I am who I am as we walk together through our life together. You will see who I am and who I become.

God is a suffering, vulnerable parenting God but not a passive God. Out of God's suffering with the children of Israel, God acts. God rises up and calls Moses to free God's people, but it will not be through violent revolution. It will be through freak acts of nature. Moses and Aaron will never be able to say, We freed Israel because Israel was freed by gnats and frogs and darkness and 7 other freak acts of nature. They were not saved by F16 fighter planes. They were saved by flies. They were not saved by bombs. They were saved by boils. God works in ways that are consistent with God's place as Creator of the universe.

Exodus 15:8 and 10 talk about the breath or Spirit of God, which moved the waters back and moved the world towards life as in the creation of the world and the creation of Jesus. The breath of God is what breathed life into the dead Jesus at Easter and will breathe abundant life into us as well. The breath of God is the power of life over death as Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, "death has been swallowed up in victory. Where O death is your victory? Where O death is your sting?" The breath of God in creation, in the exodus and in Jesus' resurrection are deeply linked to each other and guide our trust for life with God as well.

God says, "I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. You shall be my treasured possession." God is passionate for the children of Israel and that love will sometimes be returned and sometimes will be rejected. But God will forever be present to them and suffer along with them, bearing them up on eagle's wings. Let us pray:

Saving God, as you brought the children of Israel safely out of slavery and brought Jesus safely from the tomb, we give you thanks for your steadfast love and safely bringing us to this Easter day. Strengthen us to live confidently and joyfully in your love.

Sing #590 HWB, And I will raise you up.