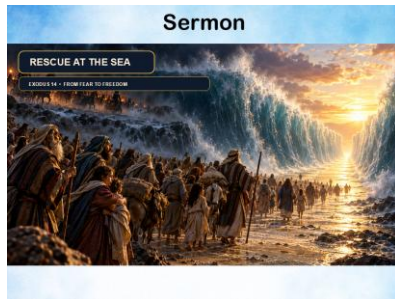
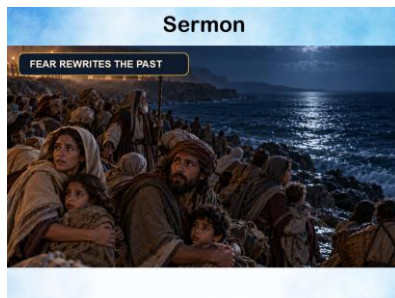


SLIDE 1 RESCUE AT THE SEA

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord who still liberates us from sin, death, and the devil, Jesus Christ our Savior, amen.

SLIDE 2 FEAR REWRITES THE PAST

The people of Israel have made it out of Egypt, but they're not yet free. Pharaoh has let them go, then changed his mind. The army is closing in behind them. The sea blocks the way ahead. There is no obvious escape route, and fear takes over. Their first words to Moses are sharp. "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?" Fear has a way of talking like that. It takes the worst possibility and declares it certain. It looks at a hard present and rewrites the past. Egypt had been a place of forced

Rescue at the Sea

labor, violence, and death. Yet, with Pharaoh's chariots approaching, slavery begins to sound safer than freedom.

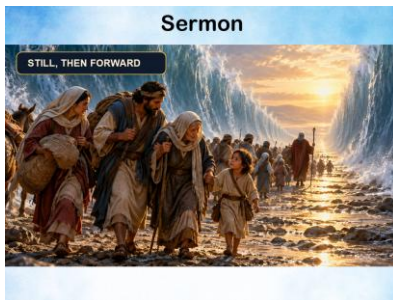
That response may seem foolish until we recognize it in ourselves. We also cling to what is familiar when the future looks uncertain. We stay inside habits that diminish us because at least we know them. We return to old resentments because they make the world feel simple. We accept arrangements that hurt other people because changing them would ask something of us. The familiar can feel safe even when it is not good. This story tells the truth about liberation. Leaving Egypt is one thing. Learning to live as free people takes longer. Pharaoh can be behind us while the fear Pharaoh planted still travels with us. God may open a future, and we may still look backward and imagine that bondage was better.

SLIDE 3 A WAY THROUGH THE NIGHT

Moses does not shame the people for being afraid. He says, “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today.” These are words for people who have reached the end of their own power.

Rescue at the Sea

Israel cannot outfight the army. They cannot command the sea. Their rescue will begin with God's action, not with their strength. That's where grace begins for us too. We don't save ourselves by becoming fearless enough or faithful enough. God meets frightened people at the water's edge. God hears the cry of those trapped by powers larger than themselves. Before Israel can see a path, God is already at work. The rescue doesn't happen all at once. Exodus says the Lord drives the sea back with a strong east wind "all night." I often picture the sea parting in a single dramatic instant. The text gives us a longer scene. Darkness settles over the people. The wind keeps blowing. Hour after hour, God makes a way where there was no way. Sometimes God's deliverance comes suddenly. More often, we experience it through a long night sitting in the dark, waiting with the east wind blowing in our face. A person begins recovery one day at a time. A grieving family learns how to live with an empty chair. The wind may be blowing long before we can see dry ground. Moses tells the people to keep still, but the story doesn't end with them standing on the shore. When the way opens, they have to walk into it. They move forward because God has made forward possible.

SLIDE 4 STILL, THEN FORWARD

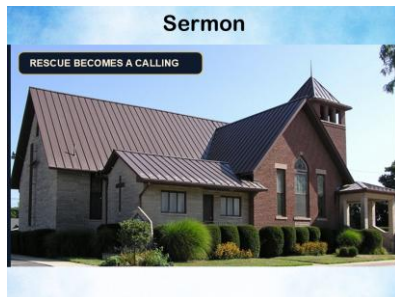
Faith holds stillness and movement together. We become still enough to notice what God is doing, then step into the way God provides. Stillness without movement can become avoidance. Movement without trust can become panic. Israel waits for God's path, and then Israel walks in faith. We need that kind of faith when loud voices tell us fear should make our decisions. We hear anger presented as strength. We hear cruelty defended as necessity. We hear people reduced to problems, enemies, or burdens. The prayer of the day asks God to open a way through voices of anger and hatred that threaten to drown us. God's way leads us through the waters of violence and hatred toward love, justice, and peace. We may not see the whole road. Israel could not see the promised land from the edge of the sea. They received enough light for the next step. God often gives us the same gift: enough courage to tell the truth, enough mercy to refuse contempt, enough strength to protect a neighbor, enough hope to keep moving forward.

SLIDE 5 LIBERATION WITHOUT DELIGHT IN DEATH

This is a story of rescue, but it is not an easy story. The same waters that open for Israel close over Pharaoh's army. Human beings die. If we tell the story only as a thrilling victory, we risk treating those deaths as scenery or collateral damage. Scripture does not ask us to celebrate suffering. Later Jewish tradition imagines the angels beginning to sing as the Egyptians drown, and God silencing them by saying, "My creatures are perishing, and you sing praises?" That teaching doesn't erase the text's violence, but it gives us a faithful posture toward it. We can thank God for liberation without delighting in anyone's destruction. We should also remember what Pharaoh's army represents. This is the military force of a ruler who enslaved God's chosen people, ordered the killing of their children, and refused repeated calls to let them go. The sea does not divide humanity into people God loves and people God does not. It brings an empire's pursuit to an end. God hears the cries of the enslaved and refuses to let Pharaoh have the final word. That both comforts and convicts us. We want God to stop the chariots that chase us, but we're less eager to notice the chariots from which we benefit. The prayers today

Rescue at the Sea

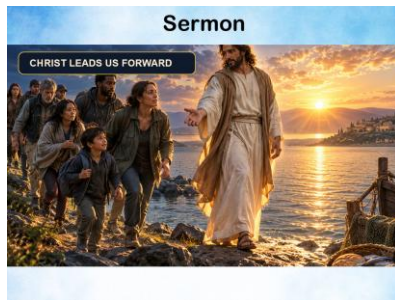
name oppression, injustice, poverty, war, and our own complicity in systems that cause needless suffering. Exodus invites us to ask where human lives still get spent to protect someone else's power or comfort. God's liberation isn't merely for private relief. God frees an entire people so they can learn a new life together. Soon they will receive commandments shaped by worship, rest, truth, and care for the neighbor. They'll be told to remember the stranger because they were strangers in Egypt. Rescue becomes a calling. People whom God has freed must not rebuild Egypt for somebody else.

SLIDE 6 RESCUE BECOMES A CALLING

The church carries that calling into the world. We stand with people hemmed in by hunger, illness, prejudice, violence, or despair. We use our voices when others are ignored. We examine the habits and systems that keep some people secure by keeping others afraid. We do this without pretending we're the saviors. Only God saves, but God sends freed people to serve their neighbors.

SLIDE 7 THROUGH WATER, FED FOR THE JOURNEY

For Christians, the passage through the sea also echoes at the baptismal font. In baptism, God joins us to the death and resurrection of Jesus. The old claim of sin and death is drowned in the waters of baptism. God brings us through the water and gives us a new identity as beloved children, members of Christ's body, people called to live in freedom. The freedom God gives in baptism is renewed today at the communion rail. The invitation to the table names this meal as a feast of liberation from sin and death. We come with empty hands so our Savior Jesus Christ can fill us with himself which we receive in the bread and wine. We receive forgiveness we could not earn and life we could not create. At the rail, frightened people kneel beside one another and hear the same promise: "given for you" and "shed for you." Communion is food for people on the way. Christ meets us here, then sends us back into a world where seas still need to be parted and chains still need to fall. The post communion prayer asks God to make us living signs of liberation, healing, and love. Those prayers give our lives purpose and direction.

SLIDE 8 CHRIST LEADS US FORWARD

Some of us arrive today with an army at our backs. A diagnosis has changed the landscape. Grief keeps pressing close. Money is tight. A conflict has gone on too long. The future looks like deep water with no bridge. This story does not promise every danger will disappear in the way we choose. It promises Pharaoh is not God; fear is not God; death is not God. The Lord who heard Israel's cry remains faithful. So, be still long enough to remember who fights for life. Listen for the wind of the Spirit in the darkness. When God opens the next faithful step, take it. You don't have to cross the whole sea today. Walk the ground God places beneath your feet. And when you come to the rail, come as one of God's people on the journey. Bring your fear, your weariness, and your hope. Receive Christ's body and blood. Then rise with your siblings and go forward. May the God who led Israel through the sea and raised Jesus from the dead bless you with courage when you are afraid, guide your steps in freedom, and nourish you for the journey, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.