

A Sermon by the Rev. Jeffrey A. Packard	Prepared for the congregation of Christ Episcopal Church, Spotsylvania, VA
To be delivered on September 17, 2017	On the occasion of the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 19A

Exodus 14:19-31

Making Ways Since 1450 BC

The Israelites are in a jam. They have nowhere left to go. The Egyptian army is behind them in hot pursuit, and in front of them is the Red Sea. They are trapped. Surely the Egyptians will overtake them, capture them, and take them back to slavery. Or worse yet, they might slaughter them right there on the shore of the Red Sea. Moses had led them out with such high hopes, but now all their hopes are about to be destroyed in a moment.

But God was not finished with the Israelites. He sent his servant Moses to set them free from their captivity and he would not let a little thing like a huge body of water get in the way of fulfilling his promises. God told Moses to stretch out his hand over the water, and the Red Sea was divided so the Israelites could go through on dry ground. The water formed a wall for them on each side. It was the central miracle of the Exodus. It was a defining moment in their history and in their relationship with God.

That's what God does. God makes a way where there appears to be none. He does it again and again in the Scriptures. He's done it again and again in the life of this parish too. God calls us to do great things, and then God somehow provides a way for it to happen, as long as we are willing to follow in faith. That's what God does, and that is who God is. God is the way maker. When we see a stumbling block, God turns it into a stepping stone.

Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea, as I said, was a defining moment for the Israelites. Before they left the wilderness, however, Moses would die and his assistant, Joshua, would take over. It would be Joshua who led the people out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land. Do you remember how that happened? The Israelites came to the brink of the river Jordan. On

the other side was the Promised Land. There was no bridge. There was no ferry. There was no way for them to cross over the river and get to the land that had been promised to their ancestors, to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. They were stuck. Do you remember what happened next? Joshua sent the priests ahead of the people carrying the Ark of the Covenant. Here's how it is described in Joshua chapter 3. "¹⁴When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people. ¹⁵Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, ¹⁶the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan."

Sound familiar? God did it again. Because that's what God does. God removes the obstacles in front of us so we can carry out God's will. That's who God is. God is the way maker. This parallel action was mentioned in our Psalm today: "The sea beheld it and fled; Jordan turned and went back... What ailed you, O sea, that you fled? O Jordan, that you turned back?"

It happened again too. When God was about to take Elijah up into heaven, Elisha knew that something was up. So when Elijah told him to stay put while Elijah crossed over the Jordan, Elisha refused and insisted on going with him. They walked along until they came to the shore of the Jordan river. Do you remember what happened? Elijah took off his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water of the Jordan, and the waters parted allowing them to cross over on dry

ground. Then Elijah was taken up by a fiery chariot right before Elisha's eyes. As he was taken up, Elijah's mantle fell to the ground. Here is what we are told happened next in Second Kings, chapter two: "¹³(Elisha) picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. ¹⁴He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, "Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over."

God did it again. God does it again and again; He makes a way where there is none. The ultimate way, of course, was Jesus who was sent by God to be the Way. When all we see is death, Jesus is the Way... to life. When we feel enslaved to sin, Jesus is the Way... to redemption. When we feel trapped, with no place left to go, no way out of our troubles, Jesus is the Way... to salvation. Jesus is the Way... then, now, and always, because God is the same... then, now, and always. God is the Way maker. What God has done for you in the past, God will do again... and again, and again, and again.

Amen.