

Sermon for Christ Church, Spotsylvania, VA  
Easter Vigil, March 31, 2018  
The Rev. Bill Queen, “The Salvation Story Continues”

the Easter Vigil may use up to nine Old Testament readings; but no matter how many of the Old Testament readings are done, the reading about the Israelites’ Exodus from Egypt is always required; it is the paradigm of all salvation stories; it is important to recognize that the word “salvation” has two meanings in the Bible; we probably think of salvation most often as “eternal salvation,” as being “saved” as opposed to being “damned”

the other meaning has to do with physical survival; that’s what was at stake for the Israelites, as they faced what we would now call the genocide of their people, had they not been able to make their escape out of Egypt; much of the Old Testament has to do with just that—time and time again God physically saving the lives of the Jews; (I recently heard someone summarize Jewish Holy Days as this: “they tried to kill us, they didn’t succeed, let’s eat”); it’s this sense of physical salvation, of keeping people alive, that I’m focusing on tonight

before the Old Testament readings, you heard me say this: “Let us hear the record of God’s saving deeds in history, how he saved his people in ages past;” God has done amazing things in ages past, but that is only part of God’s salvation story; we would be mistaken if we thought that God only did amazing things in the past and is not still doing them today; we would be mistaken if we thought that God only did amazing things for “God’s people” and is not working in the lives of people of every nation and of every faith; and who really has the right to define who are or who are not “God’s people” anyway?—that is up to God, not us; so I want to use a modified version of that phrase I used earlier: Let us continue to hear the record of God’s saving deeds now, how he saves people today

it was in the year 2000 that my family first came into contact with some of the “Lost Boys” of Sudan; following war in their country (which was only one of several long wars their country has had and is still having, even after South Sudan being split off as a separate country), tens of thousands mostly of boys, but some girls too, were displaced from their villages, many orphaned, many went to refugee camps, and many were eventually resettled throughout the

world; that is how we got to know them in Richmond, where there is still a large Sudanese community; and many of them are Episcopalians, as the Episcopal Church has had a long history of missionary work in Sudan

the boys told us what had happened to them; first of watching their villages being attacked, by airplanes and helicopters, before soldiers arrived and killed almost everyone they could find; the young boys were out tending cattle in the brush, so they were largely spared from the attacks; finding themselves without families or adults to care for them, they looked out for each other as best as they could; they walked hundreds of miles, first to Ethiopia; along the way some were killed by wild animals; some died crossing rivers; some died from starvation or from thirst; then the ones who survived were expelled from Ethiopia and had to walk back through Sudan, facing all the same dangers as before, then into Kenya where they were settled in refugee camps

these refugee boys attest that they know for sure that the only way they survived such an ordeal was by God's intervention; this is their salvation story and it is no less amazing a story, or no less holy a story, a story no less worthy of retelling, than the story of the Exodus; it is the Sudanese Exodus story

other salvation stories much like this are going on right now: Christian, Kurdish, non-Sunni, and non-extremist Muslims are fleeing from ISIS in Syria and Iraq; children, young people, and adults are fleeing drug lords and gang violence in Central America; people would like to flee, but are not able to, from the misery in Haiti (that's why it is so important for us to keep praying for our brothers and sisters at Notre Dame Parish in Port au Prince)

even in the U.S. and here in Spotsylvania County people are seeking salvation from ongoing cycles of poverty, hunger, crime, and addiction; in all of these places, and in many others, people are experiencing firsthand God's saving power; and all of these salvation stories continue because The Salvation Story—God's salvation story—continues; it continues because God is still here working for us and for those in need

so much of what we hear about and re-enact in church from Palm Sunday through Easter Sunday has to do with the past; while it is a very important past, we can't forget that it's up to us to embrace God's promises of salvation from the past, to live them out in the present, and to pass them along for the

future; living out our own salvation story requires us to work, to pray, and to give for the spread of God's salvation work for all people