

# “WAYMAKER”

Rev. Becky Stephens

**Text: Exodus 14:19-31 (selected verses within the sermon)**

**God’s Word: Psalm 46**

Have you seen the movie, *Inside Out*? This is a Disney movie that came out a few years back, a movie that gave us an inside look at all of the emotions going on inside of an 11 year old girl named Riley who is trying her best to adapt to all the change in her life that is happening as a result of moving from Minnesota to San Francisco with her mom and dad. The bottom line is this. What happens on the outside, her behavior, is being driven by what is happening on the inside. That is true in each of our lives and stories too.

Today we’re going to talk about this thing called Fear. I was reading an article from a doctor a few weeks ago that I think bring a much needed perspective. Listen to this, an Infectious Disease Specialist said this...

*“...I'm scared about what message we are telling our kids when faced with a threat. Instead of reason, rationality, open mindedness and altruism, we are telling them to panic, be fearful, suspicious, reactionary and self-interested...Our own behaviors and "fight for yourself above all else" attitude could prove disastrous. I implore you all. Temper fear with reason, panic with patience and uncertainty with education. Facts not fear. Clean hands. Open hearts. Our children will thank us for it.”*

So we are calling this virus a pandemic. In other words it’s a disease that is spreading over a large part of the world. That’s true, but it seems to me that there is an even greater pandemic that is actually spreading faster than the corona virus can or ever will. All of our care, caution, concern, and preparation is good. We are taking steps to do all of that here, too. BUT...care, caution, concern, preparation and isolation doesn’t really address the greater pandemic...our fear. So what is the real antidote for all of this fear that seems to be alive and well, living just below the surface in most of us? I want us to spend the rest of our time together today talking about that.

If you have a Bible in front of you we are going to be in Exodus chapter 14 today. If not, no sweat, everything I read will show up on the screen. Let’s grab a little bit of context so that we are all on the same page with this story that we are jumping into together today. God’s people Israel had been slaves in Egypt, God brings plagues, Pharaoh finally decides to let God’s people go, shortly after that they leave Egypt Pharaoh gets angry, changes his mind, and comes after them. So, here we go, Exodus chapter 14 beginning with verse 10...

*<sup>10</sup> As Pharaoh approached, the people of Israel looked up and panicked when they saw the Egyptians overtaking them. They cried out to the LORD, <sup>11</sup> and they said to Moses, “Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren’t there enough graves for us in Egypt? What have you done to us? Why did you make us leave Egypt? <sup>12</sup> Didn’t we tell you this would happen while we were still in Egypt? We said, ‘Leave us alone! Let us be slaves to the Egyptians. It’s better to be a slave in Egypt than a corpse in the wilderness!’”*

*<sup>13</sup> But Moses told the people, “Don’t be afraid. Just stand still and watch the LORD rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today will never be seen again. <sup>14</sup> The LORD himself will fight for you. Just stay calm.”*

*15 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the people to get moving! 16 Pick up your staff and raise your hand over the sea. Divide the water so the Israelites can walk through the middle of the sea on dry ground.*

Okay. So let's make sure we get this. God's people have made it to the Red Sea. So there is the sea on one side and Pharaoh's Army closing in quickly on the other side. In other words, they're trapped. There is no way out. How do they respond?

One word...fear...they are terrified and they start ripping on Moses, their leader. They start forming the "Back to Egypt" Club. Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Now, it's interesting here that their minds so quickly return to Egypt but not to the very last thing that happened before they were released as slaves in Egypt.

What was that? God showed up. This little thing called Passover. God killed the firstborn son of every household in Egypt, saved them and their families, and released them from slavery.

All God has done often gets lost in what he is not currently doing. So in the midst of the fear that you are battling today, whatever it is, whatever the source of that fear I think it would serve each of us really well to start with this question...

WHOSE POWER AND STRENGTH AM I REALLY LEANING INTO? I don't know how you answer that so let me go ahead and answer for me. My own. I've come a long way in my journey with God on this but if I am honest, more often than not, I realize that I have been leaning on into my own strength and power. My default position has been to lean into my own strength. How about you?

Moses here tells the people to be still, do nothing, and God will fight for them. That seems to contradict what the Bible says doesn't it? The Bible says that God helps those who help themselves. Actually, it doesn't say that.

So, what's the takeaway here? When we are facing fear do we just kick back, sit still, do nothing and let God deal with it? Am I telling you that in light of our recent scare you shouldn't be buying toilet paper? No. I am telling you leave some for someone else for goodness sake. More importantly, I am telling you that in moments of fear like this, when you find yourself between a rock and a hard place, nowhere to turn, to pause and ask yourself the question...Whose power and strength am I really leaning into right now? Let's jump back into the story at verse 21...

*21 Then Moses raised his hand over the sea, and the LORD opened up a path through the water with a strong east wind. The wind blew all that night, turning the seabed into dry land. 22 So the people of Israel walked through the middle of the sea on dry ground, with walls of water on each side!*

*23 Then the Egyptians—all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and charioteers—chased them into the middle of the sea.*

So question. Aren't there easier and quicker ways for God to deal with the problem here? I mean God could just drop a fireball from the sky and vaporize Pharaoh and his entire army. In just one second, the entire problem goes away. While God's way of walking through the sea with the water raised on each side would be a scenic spectacular view. I don't think it is what any one of them or any of us would choose.

What they really want is what we want too. We want whatever it is that is scaring us to be totally and completely gone. Here's the thing. God is after something deeper here. So, second question as we stare down fear in our lives. Ask yourself this question...

AM I THINKING SHORT TERM AND SMALL STORY? If I really think about it all I am really able to think about in the midst of my fear is what? That mountain, challenge, or problem right in front of me as I live in a story that really revolves around who...around me.

So, what are you most afraid of as you sit here today? Could be Corona most likely it's something else. Something that hits closer to home for you today. Some of us are afraid of where our marriage is headed, other relationships, our jobs, our incomes, our futures, the path our kids are traveling, the diagnosis, being this lonely, and feeling so alone for the rest of our lives. All kinds of answers to that question aren't there? Yes there are.

In the midst of the fear, the enemy is the master of keeping the story small and keeping us thinking short term.

So, let's go back to this moment with the people of Israel, as they walk through the sea with the water raised high on both sides. Question. What does God's way of dealing with the challenge they are facing, and the fear that comes with that, require that their way wouldn't have? Answer. It requires them to trust God every step of the way. God's response doesn't eliminate the source of their fear. Instead he requires them to walk into it and through it. What do they have to lean into as they do that? Answer. Him. Are you seeing this? It points to the ultimate answer for every one of these things that we are wrestling with that is going on inside of us. God is there and he cares. You are not alone. Here is where we often get hung up. Our focus tends to be on what God is doing for us. His focus is always on what he is doing in us.

God, by allowing this to be harder in the short term now, is building a resiliency and strength in the face of fear that will serve them for the long term, from now on.

Let's go back to the story. So God opens up a way for his people but the truth is that Pharaoh's Army, the source of their fear is still there, still bearing down and gaining ground on them. Let's pick it up there and finish this verse 26...

*<sup>26</sup> When all the Israelites had reached the other side, the LORD said to Moses, "Raise your hand over the sea again. Then the waters will rush back and cover the Egyptians and their chariots and charioteers." <sup>27</sup> So as the sun began to rise, Moses raised his hand over the sea, and the water rushed back into its usual place. The Egyptians tried to escape, but the LORD swept them into the sea. <sup>28</sup> Then the waters returned and covered all the chariots and charioteers—the entire army of Pharaoh. Of all the Egyptians who had chased the Israelites into the sea, not a single one survived.*

*<sup>29</sup> But the people of Israel had walked through the middle of the sea on dry ground, as the water stood up like a wall on both sides. <sup>30</sup> That is how the LORD rescued Israel from the hand of the Egyptians that day. And the Israelites saw the bodies of the Egyptians washed up on the seashore. <sup>31</sup> When the people of Israel saw the mighty power that the LORD had unleashed against the Egyptians, they were filled with awe before him. They put their faith in the LORD and in his servant Moses.*

So finally when the source of all their fear is gone... they what? They put their trust in God. That's great. Sound familiar? It does to me. Think about this story. These people have been carrying this escalating fear since the very first time they spotted Pharaoh and his army pursuing them way off in the distance. They are absolutely terrified about something that never really touches them, affects them, it never even becomes reality at all for them. Isn't it true? Isn't that really the story of so many moments in our lives, too. We say that courage is not the absence of fear, but action in the midst of fear. Courage is "I refuse to allow my fear to paralyze me" and courage is a good thing, it's a great thing. While that is true, as we stare down our fears, here's what we most need to walk away from this with today...

THE ANSWER IS NOT MORE COURAGE, IT'S MORE FAITH.

See, here's our challenge. Muscles that never get exercised, worked out, and broken down never get stronger. Let's just be honest. Faith day is a lot like leg day at the gym. Most of us would prefer to skip it. What most of us are really looking for and prefer is a faith that doesn't require much faith. God tells us without faith it is impossible to please him. Think about that. If that's true the kindest thing that he could actually do for us is walk with us through things that actually help us exercise it and build it.

I want to go back to that song we sang a little bit earlier today, that song called "Do it Again". "God, I've seen you move, you move the mountains, and I believe I'll see you do it again." It isn't it great when that happens? Yeah it is. I pray, and this thing that has me totally and completely freaked out and scared is just gone. That's awesome.

Here's my question. What about when that doesn't happen? That's where faith comes in doesn't it? See, faith is not the removal of or the absence of mountains in my life. Faith is my response when this thing that makes me anxious, that makes me angry, that scares me to death, those things that I want and need to move in my life to go away, but they don't move or change at all. What do we do with that? It's why I love the next lyric to that song. "You made a way when there was no way and I believe I'll see you do it again." That's the lyric that I think we need to lean most into today. See, removing it is not the only way that God makes a way. The truth in all of our lives is that sometimes God doesn't remove it, but he always provides a way to get me around it, over it, and through it.

See, courage is "whatever life throws at you you've got this", faith is "whatever life throws at you God's got you." That's so much better.

We see it up close and personal in the life of Jesus. He knew that life on this earth would lead him to the cross, but as he sits there on the eve of that happening in the Garden of Gethsemane fear comes over him. He has walked past many people dying on Roman crosses alongside the road during his life. It is a brutal and terrifying way to die. In his fear he cries out to his Father. Father can we change the plan but he doesn't stop there. What does he say next...even if you don't Father...I'm good...Your will not my will be done. Either way, I'm all in. In the midst of my fear I'm leaning into you. I trust you. I'm okay, it is well with me.

Psalms 46 says this...

*1 God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.*

*2 So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea.*

Before we shut this down I think we need to spend a little time leaning into that. In the midst of our fear, whatever we are afraid of, the goal today is not for any of us to tell ourselves that we are not afraid, the goal is for all of us to remember that we are never alone and walk in that. A.W. Tozer said "a scared world needs a fearless church". Let's lock arms and continue to work on being just that. Let's leave this message and go out and love, help, care for, take care, and encourage all the vulnerable and scared people out there in the world around us. Let's be a fearless church.