

Lent Devotional April 1, 2020

Scripture

Exodus 7:8-24

8 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 9 “When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Perform a wonder,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.’” 10 So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the LORD had commanded; Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. 11 Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts. 12 Each one threw down his staff, and they became snakes; but Aaron’s staff swallowed up theirs. 13 Still Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. 14 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go. 15 Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water; stand by at the river bank to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was turned into a snake. 16 Say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, “Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness.” But until now you have not listened.’ 17 Thus says the LORD, “By this you shall know that I am the LORD.” See, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall be turned to blood. 18 The fish in the river shall die, the river itself shall stink, and the Egyptians shall be unable to drink water from the Nile.” 19 The LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over its rivers, its canals, and its ponds, and all its pools of water—so that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout the whole land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.’” 20 Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and of his officials he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the river, and all the water in the river was turned into blood, 21 and the fish in the river died. The river stank so that the Egyptians could not drink its water, and there was blood throughout the whole land of Egypt. 22 But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts; so Pharaoh’s heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them; as the LORD had said. 23 Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. 24 And all the Egyptians had to dig along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the river.

Devotional

The Rev. Dr. John M. Fife '67, Specialized Ministry (1986)

The Book of Exodus reveals the identity and nature of the God who created the heavens and earth and made covenant with Abraham and Sarah. This God declares that he has heard the cry of his people in bondage in Egypt, that he is “the Lord your God” and means to free them from Egypt. “Go tell Pharaoh, ‘Let my people go.’” God is the God who is with the oppressed and suffering in their quest for liberation.

Second, this text from Exodus 7:8-24 relates the struggle of the Hebrew slaves against the Pharaoh of the Egyptian empire over the question of ultimate power. Are the Empire and the wealth, the horses and chariots, and the gods and sorcerers of Egypt more powerful than the God who makes covenant with the enslaved Hebrews? Which is most powerful?

The saga here reminds me of the line from a Broadway musical, “Anything you can do, I can do better”! Aaron takes the rod of Moses, casts it down, and it turns into a serpent. All the sorcerers of Egypt do the same magic, but Moses’ serpent devours them all. Then with the same rod, Moses and Aaron strike the waters of the Nile, which then turns to blood. The sorcerers of Egypt match them serpent to serpent, blood to blood. Pharaoh’s heart remains hardened.

Of course, empires have always trusted in their wealth, power, military might, and conquests, and the sorcerers and magicians who make it all look like the gods are on their side. . . . except the witness of the

Bible is that the God of the Torah, the Prophets, and Jesus is more powerful than all the empires of history. This is the God who means to free the oppressed and seeks to lead all of beloved creation into the Kingdom of God. Then all people will live in a covenant of justice, mercy, and peace.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke prophetically when he was asked how people suffering through generations of slavery and segregation could ever expect to become free. King said, "The arc of history is long indeed, but it always bends toward justice."

Prayer

Creator God, Great and Holy Spirit, we would be faithful to the coming of your Kingdom even as we live in an empire. Teach us anew the power of doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with the God who means to free the suffering and oppressed. In the name of Jesus, crucified on a cross of the Roman Empire and raised from death by God, amen.