

Lent Devotional April 4, 2020

Scripture

Exodus 10:21-11:8

21 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt." 22 So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was dense darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. 23 People could not see one another, and for three days they could not move from where they were; but all the Israelites had light where they lived. 24 Then Pharaoh summoned Moses, and said, "Go, worship the LORD. Only your flocks and your herds shall remain behind. Even your children may go with you." 25 But Moses said, "You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings to sacrifice to the LORD our God. 26 Our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must choose some of them for the worship of the LORD our God, and we will not know what to use to worship the LORD until we arrive there." 27 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was unwilling to let them go. 28 Then Pharaoh said to him, "Get away from me! Take care that you do not see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die." 29 Moses said, "Just as you say! I will never see your face again." 11:1 The LORD said to Moses, "I will bring one more plague upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go from here; indeed, when he lets you go, he will drive you away. 2 Tell the people that every man is to ask his neighbor and every woman is to ask her neighbor for objects of silver and gold." 3 The LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, Moses himself was a man of great importance in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's officials and in the sight of the people. 4 Moses said, "Thus says the LORD: About midnight I will go out through Egypt. 5 Every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the firstborn of the female slave who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the livestock. 6 Then there will be a loud cry throughout the whole land of Egypt, such as has never been or will ever be again. 7 But not a dog shall growl at any of the Israelites—not at people, not at animals—so that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. 8 Then all these officials of yours shall come down to me, and bow low to me, saying, 'Leave us, you and all the people who follow you.' After that I will leave." And in hot anger he left Pharaoh.

Devotional

The Rev. Curtis D. Illingworth '70, Specialized Ministry (2014)

I remember the accounts of the plagues from my Sunday school days. I can still visualize the illustrations of the plagues in my picture Bible—they were quite dramatic: the frogs, flies, boils, and locusts (my favorite). I haven't thought about them much since. My understanding of the God of the New Testament does not seem to be present in these acts meant to inflict pain and suffering. But in Exodus 10:21-11:8, we have the accounts of the last two plagues. We read the ninth one: Moses stretched out his hand and "there was darkness in all the land of Egypt." Next we travel back through time to number ten: death. (As we travel back, we might stop to remember how King Herod massacred the firstborn in his region). Here Moses tells the people, "Thus says the LORD: About midnight I will go out through Egypt. Every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die." Nice! Nice?

Fast-forward to the year 2020 A.D. and I see these plagues differently. I now see God leading me out of the darkness of my selfishness and the lifeless silence and thoughtlessness of a meaningless future. I cross the Red Sea into a wilderness of trials and sacrifices we call "life," and I get a glimpse of entering the new "promised land." Now I recall studying the laws of the universe in physics, biology, and math on my path to becoming an architect. Here are some thoughts on modern-day plagues through the eyes of science.

Light and Darkness: In physics I learned that there is no such thing as darkness. It's a word scientists use to describe the absence of light. We can measure the amount of light in a room, but there is no measurement for darkness. We don't say, "Close the door—you're letting the darkness in!" Likewise when you open a door, darkness does not "spill out." Light is real, it is the source of life; darkness is a void. It is nothing. A plague of darkness is a plague of nothingness.

Life and Death: There is no such thing as death either. It's a word scientists use to describe the absence of life. We promise, "Until death do us part." After that, does the promise end? A plague of death to the firstborn of a generation is a signal that the future is void. There is nothing more.

Heat and Cold: As strange as it might sound, there is no such thing as cold. It might be freezing cold outside, but physics will tell you that cold is just a word we use describe the absence of heat. There is an absolute zero, but there is no absolute in measuring heat. We crave warmth and sunshine to grow and thrive. Without it we die.

Sound and Silence: Additionally, there is no such thing as silence. It's a word we use to describe the absence of sound. Do I keep silent when I see injustice? Do I tell those around me that I love them and show it in my actions, or do I remain quiet? Am I silent when I should speak? The plague of silence can be deafening.

I now find myself searching for my own promised land. I have spent time in the wilderness making mistakes and sacrifices, asking for forgiveness. Over the horizon I can see my promised land. I try to sort out the good from the bad. Light, Life, Warmth, and Words are all realities that describe my promised land. Darkness, Death, Cold, and Silence are the plagues that overwhelm my life and that, with God's help, I will escape.

Journey with me and escape the plagues of the modern world. Journey through the wilderness of discovery and faith. Journey to the promised land of sustained life.

- Choose the **light of Christ**, through which you will see others in God's light instead of the blind darkness of the world.
- Choose the **richness of a life in Christ** that grows and nourishes over the emptiness of death.
- Choose the **warmth of Christ's love** to sustain your relationships over the cold emptiness of separating yourselves from others.
- Choose the **Word made flesh in Christ** by proclaiming His word and deeds over the silence of those who are skeptical.

Enter the promised land of hope and dreams!

Prayer

Our heavenly Father, you have ordered the universe with physical laws that control the stars above and the world below. You have given us life and the freedom to choose our path. Help us to avoid the modern-day plagues that tempt us daily; help us discover the life-giving universal laws found in your word. Light the way with your love so that we may enter the Promised Land, a life that grows and blossoms under the hand of your life giving love and care. Amen.