

Myers Park Presbyterian Church

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Deliver

Exodus 6:1-9

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During 2014, the other clergy and I have been preaching on a word a week, essential words for our journey of discipleship. After today, we have only 10 words left! Today we've come to the word "*Deliver.*"

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Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh: Indeed, by a mighty hand he will let them go; by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land." ²God also spoke to Moses and said to him: "I am the LORD. ³I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name 'The LORD' I did not make myself known to them. ⁴I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens. ⁵I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. ⁶Say therefore to the Israelites, 'I am the LORD, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. ⁷I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. ⁸I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.'" ⁹Moses told this to the Israelites; but they would not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel slavery.

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When Walt Disney built Walt Disney World in Florida, he decided that all utilities, trash, delivery trucks, food service, cafeterias and employees moving around needed to be out of sight underneath Disney World in a nine-acre underground complex of tunnels! Down in the tunnels you might see two Goofys passing each other or a Mickey Mouse without his head on or a Cinderella without her makeup. A lot of interesting life happens down in the tunnels!

The same is true for the Church. On the surface there are all the bright shiny buildings with programs and activities while underneath there are a nest of tunnels in which an array of real life happens. People deal with a lot of personal and often painful experiences down in the tunnels.

Fear and anxiety, depression, shame and guilt are all down there in the tunnels. You'll find insecurity and failure, grief and despair down there too. Sooner or later, we all go down in the tunnels because we can't live up in *Disney World* all the time. It's an illusion of perfection that doesn't really exist.

When you're in the tunnels, you cry out with the psalmist for God:

*Turn, O Lord, save my life;
deliver me for the sake of your
steadfast love. (Psalm 6:4)*

- *When your child is diagnosed with cancer, you go to the tunnels.*
- *When your marriage has eroded to a place of pain and despair, you go down in the tunnels.*
- *When you have an affair or start trying to find ways to hide your alcohol or drug habit, you go down to the tunnels.*
- *When you are living with a dark secret, you're in the tunnels.*
- *If you've maxed out all of your credit cards and borrowed against your house, and you still can't keep everything floating, you're down in the tunnels.*
- *Lose your job, your spouse, your dignity, your hope – and you're down in the tunnels.*

The question is, "Does God know you are there?"

No one wants to go there, but we all do. Some people live down there and only visit the surface. Others live up on the surface and deny there are even any tunnels at all, but they're there. The question is, "Does God know you are there?"

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The word “*deliver*” is a very powerful word in the Bible.

The Lord said to Moses,

*‘Say therefore to the Israelites, “I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and **deliver** you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. ’ (Exodus 6:6)*

Something like that may have happened once, but does it ever happen again? Does God continue to *deliver* us?

God’s covenant with Abraham was to make of him a great nation, to give him a land and to bless him, so that he would be a blessing. (Gen. 12:1-2) The numbers are tricky, but it was approximately 215 years between the time God made that covenant and when Israel entered Israel and became slaves. They could have been in Israel anywhere from 215 to 430 years, the math is slippery, but either way, they were slaves for a very long time. Generations died in Egypt as slaves and never saw the **deliverance** of God. That’s how it feels sometimes down in the tunnels. *“I may not live long enough to see myself out of this.”*

There’s always the “*death-fixes-everything*” theology. Death is the ultimate freedom from bondage. You’ve heard it said, *“At least he/she is in a better place.* But the psalmist prays:

*Turn, O Lord, save my life; (emphasis on “life”)
deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love.
(Psalm 6:4)*

That’s the prayer we pray in the tunnel. Death may be our final victory, but life is our present gift to be cherished and lived to its fullest. There is nothing wrong with wanting to be *delivered* now.

When Jesus taught us to pray, ‘... *deliver* us from evil;’ I don’t think he was talking about death. Wasn’t he talking about life? Wasn’t he talking about here and now? Does God continue to intervene in human life and *deliver* us from the bondage of our sin and from those things that oppress us? Can we pray for that? Do we expect that? Will God *deliver* us?

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I don't know if you have ever been to one of the *Services of Wholeness* here, but it is an extremely powerful experience. We have one scheduled for Tuesday, Nov. 4.

We gather here in the sanctuary, have a brief worship service with a hymn and a meditation. We then invite people to come forward for prayer.

The elders and pastors form three or four stations here in the front of the sanctuary and people stand in line down the aisle, waiting for their turn to come into a station.

All kinds of people come. Old, young, members, non-members, those who are sick, some who are broken, others come to ask for prayer for someone else. They share their needs with the elders and then we lay hands on them, as a way of sharing their faith and we pray for them. Sometimes tears flow. It's one of the most holy moments any of us experience in this church.

After the prayer, the pastor will anoint their forehead with oil in the shape of the cross, blessing them in Jesus' name. It's a humbling experience. It's a plea for *deliverance*, for God to hear their cry and *deliver* them from all kinds of bondage.

People have come and asked to be delivered from a serious illness or a failing marriage. They ask to be delivered from addictions, depression, anger and resentment. They ask that others may be delivered; a husband, wife, parent or child, from something that is robbing them of the joy of life.

Turn, O Lord, save my life; deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love. (Psalm 6:4)

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If we only lived our lives on the surface of *Disney World* we would probably miss something very important in life. Who needs God up there where everything is pristine and perfect? Where would you ever find out there are people who actually love you and care for you, no matter what? When would we learn anything about unconditional love and grace? In a perfect world, you don't need any of that, but you beg for it down in the tunnels. You long for it, you wait for it, you hope for it.

Sometimes you wait a long time for it. For some, it never comes in their lifetime. For others, it crashes in unannounced. God hears our cries in the tunnels and *delivers* us.

When Christ walked out of that tomb, did he not walk out of the tunnels on our behalf, *delivering* us from sin and death? In one sense, it has already happened. In another sense, it has not yet been fully received. We live in the tension between the two – **already and not yet.**

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The word “*deliver*” is a very powerful word in the Bible. It’s a word we cannot afford to lose. It is a word that does not lose us.

Let us pray;

*Hear the cries of all your people, O Lord,
those who are in the tunnels of
life this morning. Deliver us, lest we perish and
grant to us your peace.*

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Congregation: **Amen**