



**LIVING WORD
EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

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You Will be God to Pharaoh

Exodus 6:1-7:7

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When we left Moses last week he was at the end of his rope. He and Aaron had marched confidently into Pharaoh's throne room and had announced to the mighty king, "Thus says the Lord: Let my people go!" But instead of saying, "Oh, okay. If the Lord says so, then I'd better let you go," Pharaoh said, "No. I don't know your god. He has no power in Egypt. And for wasting my time, I'm going to increase the workload of your people." Pharaoh refused to hear the word of the Lord. In contrast, the word of Pharaoh was passed down the line, from the Egyptian taskmasters, to the Israelite foremen, to the workers themselves—and Pharaoh's word was heard and obeyed. But the Israelites were even more miserable than before. They got angry and yelled at Moses. And the Moses got angry and yelled at God.

But as I said last week, the key point that they all missed was that God *was* working—because this is always how God works—he was working to make himself known: to the Israelites, to the Egyptians, and to the watching nations. Freedom isn't an end in itself. The Lord said he was going to deliver the Israelites so that they could serve him—so that they could know him. He was going to judge the Egyptians so that they would know him. And the watching word would learn something about the Lord in the process too. Every knee would bow before the Lord, whether out of love and gratitude for deliverance or out of awe at the Lord's wrath. But for this to happen, it had to happen in the Lord's timing and in a way that would leave no question about who was acting. Both the Israelites and the

Egyptians would know that it was not Moses, but the Lord at work. And so we found, in 6:1, that all of this rejection was for a purpose.

But the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land."

"Now—now that you've failed, now that you've hit rock bottom, now that Pharaoh has put his foot down and refused—*now* you will see what I will do. So with 6:2 the Lord sort of starts all over again. In his anger, Moses has questioned God's character—his power, his sovereignty, and most importantly his faithfulness. But Moses has forgotten the most important things the God had told him, the first being, "I will be with you". The Lord now reminds Moses of what he told him back at the burning bush. Look at verses 2-3:

God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them.

"Remember, Moses, I am the I AM. I am the one who *is*. I AM the one who depends on no one and whose character and faithfulness are contingent on nothing. That means that when I say I will do something, I will do it." And the Lord seems to be saying here, "But I understand why you haven't wrapped your head around this yet. This isn't how you and your ancestors have known me—at least not primarily. Abraham and Isaac and Jacob knew me as 'God Almighty'—you may be familiar with the Hebrew *El Shaddai*—but I never met them face-to-face as I AM." You see, it's not that the patriarchs didn't know God as the Lord, as I AM. They did. But God only manifested himself to Abraham as the Lord in a *vision*—the night he established his covenant with him (Genesis 15). When God

appeared to the patriarchs—face-to-face (e. g. Genesis 17:3), he was known as *El Shaddai*, as God Almighty. But Moses has met God as I AM face-to-face. It may seem like a small thing, after all, God is known by his people in so many ways that reflect his character and his provision, but it's only now, in their deliverance from Egypt and their being named as God's children, that they are to know him face-to-face as one who is I AM and who is present with them.

Next the Lord reminds Moses of the covenant—of the promise he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. (Exodus 6:4)

The Lord promised; the Lord will deliver. Covenant faithfulness is his character—what St. Paul refers to as God's "righteousness". He goes on in verse 5:

Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant.

The Lord makes good on his covenant promises. He promised Abraham the land of Canaan. And the Israelites are not on that land; they're slaves in Egypt crying out for deliverance. So now is the time for the Lord to act to fulfil his promise. So he says to Moses:

Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the

land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.” (Exodus 6:6-8)

The Lord will act, but the key point he emphasizes here is who he is. He reminds them of his promises. He reminds them of his past faithfulness. He reminds them of his name—which speaks to who he is, his nature and his character. The point being that they need to trust him. They need to evaluate his word and respond based on who they know him to be. We’re called to trust him for the same reason—although it should be easier for us. They had his history with the patriarchs. We have his history over the course of the whole Old Testament, and even more important, we have the ultimate fulfilment of his promises in the death and resurrection of Jesus. And yet, even with all that, how often do we fail to trust the Lord? It’s really not that surprising that Israel failed to trust. But Moses goes to them anyway:

Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery.

Moses reminded them who their God is. He reminded them of his past faithfulness. He reminded them of his character. But they weren’t having it. They trusted Moses and the Lord once and what had happened as a result? Pharaoh made their slavery even worse.

I get it. I was thinking about this passage over the last couple of weeks. I’m not a big fan of this time of year, when I have to prepare reports for Synod and for the AGM and file the last year’s statistics with the REC and ACNA. It’s discouraging. I’ve been here almost eleven years and, as a church, we’re smaller now than when I arrived. Why? It forces some introspection. Am I not being faithful as a pastor? I’m not perfect, but God has laid on me the tasks of preaching

his word and administering his sacraments. I’ve done that. So what’s wrong? But I’m reminded here that there may be nothing wrong. Moses spoke the word of the Lord to the Israelites and to Pharaoh. He did what the Lord called him to do. And things got worse. But it wasn’t because Moses had failed. One of the key points here is that the deliverance of Israel from Egypt is not about Moses; it’s about the Lord. Pharaoh said “No”, not because Moses was bad at his job or somehow unfaithful, but because the Lord was hardening his heart so that everyone would see him at work when the dam finally broke. I take comfort in that. We can all take comfort in that. If we are being faithful in what the Lord has called us to do and nothing seems to be happening, it’s always a good time to look at the situation and ask if we’re being as faithful as we think we are, but if we are—we can trust God. He’s the one who ultimately causes our work to bear fruit.

So the Lord sends Moses to Pharaoh again. You’ve declared my word to him once. Declare it to him twice. It’s the job of the preacher: Declare the word of the Lord. Declare it over and over and over. That’s my job. That’s your job. But, remember, it’s not our job to make it have an effect. Only God can do that and he promises that he will. Look at verses 10-13:

So the LORD said to Moses, “Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the people of Israel go out of his land.” But Moses said to the LORD, “Behold, the people of Israel have not listened to me. How then shall Pharaoh listen to me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?” But the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them a charge about the people of Israel and about Pharaoh king of Egypt: to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

Do you see what’s happening here? Pharaoh says no to the Lord. The Israelites say no to the Lord. Even

Moses and Aaron say no to the Lord. The Lord has to metaphorically kick Moses in the seat of his pants and compelled him to go back to Pharaoh. And the point of all this resistance is to underscore that the Exodus is going to be the work of the Lord. No one will be able to take credit for it but him.

Suddenly, now, there’s a genealogy stuck into the middle of the story. I won’t read the whole thing. It begins with Simeon and Reuben, Jacob’s two oldest sons, and then Levi, the third oldest. And that’s as far as it goes with that first generation. It then works its way down five generations in the family of Levi, to Aaron, and then to Aaron’s grandson, Phineas. There’s plenty of debate on why it’s here. I’m inclined to agree with the folks who argue that this part of the story came from a simplified parallel account of the call of Moses and Aaron. Just as we have parallel accounts of Jesus in the Gospels that each emphasise different points and include differing amounts of details, there were once parallel accounts of these Old Testament events. This shorter account comes from a priestly tradition, which put the genealogy here to show Aaron’s priestly line and to show how he and his sons became so important. But the editor who put it here in the final product that the Spirit has seen to deliver to us, used it, similarly, to show that Aaron was worthy of the Lord’s call to speak for Moses. We’ve already seen Moses’ pedigree. We know why he was the right man for the Lord to call at this point in history. Here we see Aaron’s credentials. He’s in the line of Levi—the tribe that will be called to serve as Israel’s priests—and he’s the grandfather of one of the most important priests in Israel’s history. Verses 26-27 then tell us:

These are the Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said: “Bring out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt by their hosts.” It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt

about bringing out the people of Israel from Egypt, this Moses and this Aaron.

And then verses 28-30 remind us again of the Lord's command to these two. It's probably not the Lord repeating himself yet again, but the story-teller, having established the credentials of Moses and Aaron, reminding us what the Lord has told them to do:

On the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, the LORD said to Moses, "I am the LORD; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you." But Moses said to the LORD, "Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips. How will Pharaoh listen to me?"

And so, one final time, the Lord gives instructions to Moses. Again, he reiterates what his purpose is. Freedom isn't an end in itself. The goal is for everyone involved, both Israel and the Egyptians, not to mention the watching world, to know the Lord, the God of Israel. Look at 7:1-7.

And the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them." Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the LORD commanded them. Now Moses was eighty years old, and

Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

Once again, Moses and Aaron are to declare the word of the Lord to Pharaoh. And the Lord reminds them, once again, that Pharaoh will say no—and that this isn't a failure on Moses' part, nor is it a failure on the Lord's part, but that it's actually the Lord who is hardening Pharaoh's heart. And the reason for all this is so that all will know the Lord. It's interesting that we're used to talking about what the Lord is going to do in terms of "plagues"—blood, frogs, locusts, hail, etc., but the Lord speaks of them as "signs".

We'll start getting into these "signs" next week. There are different theories on what the significance of each of these signs is. Some Old Testament scholars argue that each of them was aimed at undermining one of Egypt's false gods and showing them to be powerless. There may be something to that, but at this point, the "signs" seem to be aimed at Pharaoh himself and that they leverage the way the Egyptians viewed the cosmos. John Sailhammer writes this, "Within Egyptian religion, the universe was to exist in a harmonious whole, with each part contributing to the well-balanced system. The Egyptian word for this was *ma'at*. It was the responsibility of the pharaoh, as the incarnate god on earth, to maintain this balance. The purpose of the 'plagues' was thus to challenge this basic concept by showing that the pharaoh was powerless before the God of the covenant....What we see in the plagues, then, is an unmasking of Pharaoh's claims to deity and his claim to rule the universe. Pharaoh was, in effect, taking credit for something in which he had no part, and the signs that Moses performed demonstrated that unmasking, the writer intended to show that only Yahweh is truly God."¹

The Lord is revealing himself in all his glory. It's part of his plan to bring redemption to the world. Even in judging Pharaoh and the Egyptians, his goal is not ultimately destruction, but repentance. Consider that even today, one of the first steps the Spirit has to take in bringing us to repentance is to strip us bare and to teach us that we are not our own masters. It won't come now for the Egyptians, it won't even come soon, but by the time we get to the prophets, a thousand years after the Exodus, the Lord will be speaking about the nations being drawn to the Messiah. He says through Isaiah:

And the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day and worship with sacrifice and offering, and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them. And the LORD will strike Egypt, striking and healing, and they will return to the LORD, and he will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them.

In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians.

In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance." (Isaiah 19:21-25)

It begins here with Moses and Pharaoh, but the Lord is in this for the long haul and sees a much bigger picture than Moses and the Israelites can see.

But what might be the most interesting thing in these first verses of Chapter 7 is what he says in verse 1: "I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and

¹ *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pages 252-253.

your brother Aaron shall be your prophet.” “I have made you like God to Pharaoh.” That’s actually not quite what the Hebrew says. The Hebrew has the potential to get us into trouble if we’re not careful, so the ESV tries to help out by saying that Moses will be *like* God to Pharaoh. The Hebrew simply says, “You will *be* God to Pharaoh”.

Now, this doesn’t mean that Moses will literally be God. Think of it from Pharaoh’s perspective. He was considered to be divine. He was the representative and the embodiment of the gods of Egypt. And God now puts Moses in a similar role in relation to himself. The Lord will beat Pharaoh at his own game through Moses. Through Moses, he will show that Pharaoh has no control over the elements or even over life and death. And Moses will be God, not only to Pharaoh, but to the Israelites as well. Moses will be the Lord’s instrument in delivering Israel. Moses will be the one through whom the Lord speaks to his people when he gives them his law.

I’ll close with some thoughts on this. In his role as “God to Pharaoh”, Moses was—by the grace of God—fulfilling his role as a bearer of God’s image. This is what we human beings were created for—to be God’s representatives in his creation. Creation is his temple and where, in ancient mythology, other gods placed idols of themselves in their temples to represent their rule and sovereignty, the Lord placed human beings in his temple to bear his image—to steward his temple and to extend and expand his rule over all the earth. We rebelled and rejected that role. We disrupted creation by trying to take control of it ourselves. And yet here, in Moses, we get a glimpse of what it looks like for God to proclaim his word and bring his salvation through a human being. It points us straight to Jesus, the man who truly is God to us, the very word of God incarnate who brought

salvation by his death and resurrection—a salvation meant to restore us to our role as God’s image bearers, the priests of his temple. Moses hints at that. Moses, in his imperfection, points us to Jesus, who would fulfill this role perfectly.

Brothers and Sisters, through our union with Jesus, we are God’s image bearers once again. And yet our redemption is not yet complete. And so, while our calling is to be like Jesus, all too often we are like Moses. God speaks and we doubt. God gives us his word to proclaim to the world, but we fear what may happen if we speak it. Brothers and Sisters, remember that it is our calling to proclaim. It is God who makes his word effective. Trust in him and do not be discouraged when nothing seems to be happening or when things seem to be getting worse.

And consider this, too. I expect we’ve all heard that old adage, “You may be the only Bible they ever see,” which is meant to exhort us to preach God’s word and to proclaim his gospel. But the Lord reminds us here that we may be the only “god” they see as well—or, better, we may be the first “god” they see as we witness the Lord to them. Remember, it is not God’s word alone that we preach to the world, but since Jesus has restored us to our role as image bearers, we do more than merely speak. Think of the Incarnation. God reached and redeemed us by becoming one of us himself. And now we, in whom Jesus has restored God’s image, are now his means of spreading his word and proclaiming his royal summons. It’s not just God’s word that we proclaim, but his life that we manifest. And, again, as much as we are called to be faithful, obedient, and holy, what we manifest in doing so is not our work, but the work of God’s own Spirit in us.

Let us pray: Almighty Father, make yourself known through us, we pray.

Remind us, as we steep ourselves in your word, of your character and your faithfulness to your promises. Grow our faith that we might always trust in you, even when things seem hopeless. Keep us faithful to proclaim your word and to live the life of your Spirit. But remind us always that it is not ultimately our faithfulness that makes you known to the world, but the power of your word, the power of your Spirit, and your own glorious righteousness. Amen.