

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church (Columbus, OH)
Lent Midweek 3 – March 23, 2022
Exodus 8:16-24 – God Strikes the Dust to Redeem His Sons
By Vicar Peter Wagner

In the name of Jesus. Amen. Our text is the Old Testament reading for the third Sunday of Lent, from Exodus 8, when God struck the dust of the earth to become a plague of gnats on all Egypt.

Today we continue our Lenten series about the redemption of the sons of dust. Last week we heard about the patriarch Jacob, who clung to God's blessing even though God himself seemed to fight against him. Jacob wrestled with God through the night, holding him to his ancient promise of redemption. He held God to his promise to make his descendants as numerous as the dust, to be with him and save him from Esau. So Jacob struggled with God and prevailed. God gave him a new name, Israel, the father of the nation that wrestles with God. And as God's beloved sons, we are also invited to wrestle with him. We're invited to call on our Maker in our distress, to call on him to be our Redeemer.

This week, we jump ahead more than four hundred years. In the book of Exodus, Jacob's descendants are suffering under Pharaoh as slaves in Egypt, laboring in the dust to make bricks. It seems like Israel's God has abandoned them. Yet since they are the nation that wrestles with God, they cry out to him for deliverance. And God hears their cry. He remembers his promise to Adam and Eve, he remembers his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In his remembrance, he acts. He delivers his people and redeems them from slavery. He sends his prophet Moses, demanding Pharaoh to let his people go.

God sent Moses to comfort his people and promise redemption. He said in Exodus 6, **“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.”**¹

But Exodus 6 continues, **“The people did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery.”**² As sons of dust, we often feel the same. We hear God's promises, but we're people of broken spirit. Our faith is too weak to keep holding on to him. We doubt Jesus loves us, that he's still with us. Even Moses was a man of weak faith, a feeble son of dust. He hesitated in the same chapter, **“How will Pharaoh listen to me?”**³ But that didn't matter. God chooses to accomplish his redemption using feeble sons of dust. He uses feeble, sinful preachers to show his power, that he alone is in control.

So God sent Moses in judgment against Pharaoh and Egypt, to save his people by the Ten Plagues. Pharaoh represents Satan and all powers of evil that try to thwart God's salvation. Egypt represents this evil world. And being a slave in Egypt represents slavery to our sinful human nature. But God is in control. When Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh, it became a snake. And although Pharaoh's sorcerers did the same by their secret arts, Aaron's staff swallowed theirs up. Still, Satan tried to thwart God's salvation. When Aaron struck the Nile and turned it into blood in the first plague, the magicians did the same by their secret arts, so that Pharaoh's heart remained hard. When God caused frogs to come up from the Nile in the second plague, the magicians did the same by their secret arts, so Pharaoh again hardened his heart.

The third plague put an end to all that. Today's text makes it obvious that God is in control. Aaron struck the dust of the earth with his staff, to become gnats on all the land of Egypt. But this time, when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not. They admitted to Pharaoh, **“This is the finger of God.”** So even the dust of the earth suffered God's judgment against rebellion and unbelief. And still Pharaoh did not listen. Today, we must not harden our own hearts. Instead, we should recognize the finger of God in our lives.

¹ Exodus 6:6-8

² Exodus 6:9

³ Exodus 6:30

Recognizing the finger of God means trusting that Jesus is in control. It means not being anxious, not doubting him or blaming him, not hesitating to follow him. It means repenting of trying to control our own lives. It means taking refuge in him alone.

After the fourth plague of flies, and after the fifth plague that killed all the livestock of Egypt, God used dust again. He said to Moses and Aaron, **“Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. It shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.”**⁴ By the dust of the earth, God struck all who rejected him. All men are like a handful of dust in his hand. His enemies will surely be scattered like dust in the wind. But those who take refuge in him have nothing to fear, because Jesus is in control, because the finger of God overcomes all evil.

In the seventh plague of hail, all the crops were destroyed. In the eighth plague, locusts consumed every green thing that survived the hail. How far mankind had fallen from the lush garden of Eden! In a real sense, the plagues are God undoing his own creation in judgment against our sin. Creation itself was stricken for our rebellion. The animals of Eden were gone, the plants and trees destroyed. Only bare earth remained. And then, in the ninth plague, even the light disappeared, the light which God created on the very first day. So darkness covered the land for three days.

Yet even in darkness that could be felt, God shined hope on his people. Just as the flies did not come on the people of Israel, just as the Israelite cattle did not die, the land of Goshen where God’s people lived did not go dark. So we also have hope. When our Lord was crucified for our redemption, darkness fell on the land. He was laid in the dark tomb for three days to bring us the light of salvation.

In the tenth and final plague, God sent his angel of death over the whole land of Egypt, to kill all the firstborn sons. Death is the ultimate punishment for unbelief and unrepentance. From the firstborn son of Pharaoh down to the firstborn son of the lowest slave, every family mourned their dead. But that night, the firstborn sons of Israel were saved. Israel was spared because they believed God’s warning. They obeyed Moses by faith. They slaughtered the Passover lambs in place of their firstborn sons. They painted the blood on the doorposts and lintels, they roasted the meat and ate it in haste with unleavened bread. And most importantly, they believed God’s promise to deliver them. They believed he would bring them out of Egypt that very night.

Let us follow their example of faith. Obey God’s call to repentance. Trust his salvation. Look forward to the Easter festival of Christ’s death and resurrection. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5 using Exodus imagery, **“Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”**⁵ Let Christ cleanse out your old leaven of sin. Stop returning to your old Adam, stop trying to be in control. Instead, cling to Jesus and trust his salvation. For God is patient and merciful. He graciously forgives those who repent and want to do better.

God struck the dust of the earth for you, to redeem his sons of dust, to make Satan and his minions eat the dust. As we sang on Sunday, **“Satan you wicked one, own now your master. Jesus has come! He the mighty Redeemer.”**⁶ Through Moses the son of dust, he brought his people out of Egypt and bondage to slavery. And through Christ, the son of God and son of dust, he brings us out of slavery to sin, death, and the devil. By his blood he purchased your salvation.

The word *exodus* means departure. In Lent, we look forward to the departure of Jesus. We look forward to his exodus from this world by his crucifixion on Good Friday, his resurrection at Easter, and his ascension after forty days. He departed this world for you, to lead you to heaven. As your new and greater Moses, he will bring you into the promised land, back to Eden’s paradise. Therefore, O sons of dust, hope in the sacrifice of Christ your Passover Lamb, given for you for your redemption. Amen.

⁴ Exodus 9:8-9

⁵ 1 Corinthians 5:7-8

⁶ LSB 533, “Jesus has Come and Brings Pleasure”