

**September 13, 2020 + 10:30 A.M.**  
**Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost, Proper 19**

<b>We Join in Worship</b>
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**PRELUDE**

*I Want to Be a Christian*

Mary McDonald

**\*THE PEACE OF CHRIST**

Christ's peace is with us always, no matter where we may be. And so, Christ's peace is with each and every one of us in this moment. Let us take it in. Let us really feel it. If able, please stand where you are, look around, and make signs of Christ's peace to each other.

**\*CALL TO WORSHIP** (Adapted from *Psalms* 114)

Leader: When Israel went out from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language, Judah became God's sanctuary, Israel God's dominion.

**ALL: The sea looked and fled; Jordan turned back.**

Leader: The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs.

**ALL: Why is it, O sea, that you flee? O Jordan, that you turn back? O mountains, that you skip like rams? O hills, like lambs?**

Leader: Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water.

**ALL: Let us worship God with tambourine and dance! Let us worship God with our hearts and voices!**

**INVITATION TO CONFESSION:**

Leader: In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes, "Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God." Let us confess our sins before the judgment seat of our merciful God.

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION** (unison)

**Great Jehovah, we come before your judgment seat with confession on our lips and contrition in our hearts. We confess that we have lost hope as we have lost the things that comfort us and strengthen us. We have begun to let bitterness sink into our bones. We have lost sight of the truth that you are there to comfort us and strengthen us even in the worst of seasons. Like the Israelites huddled by the Sea of Reeds, we huddle in fear and hopelessness. Forgive us for our loss of hope and lack of faith. Shine bright before us so that we may know you are here. We pray in the name of your son Jesus Christ. Amen.**

**KYRIE** (Instrumental)

## ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Leader: Friends, hear the good news! Jesus commanded us to forgive seventy-seven times, and Jesus himself forgives us as many times as need be.  
ALL: **In Jesus Christ we are forgiven! Hallelujah! Thanks be to God!**

**GLORIA PATRI:** (Instrumental)

**\*STATEMENT OF FAITH:** (From *The Scots Confession*)

**We most surely believe that God preserved, instructed, multiplied, honored, adorned, and called from death to life his Church in all ages since Adam until the coming of Christ Jesus in the flesh. For God called Abraham from his father's country, instructed him, and multiplied his seed; God marvelously preserved him, and more marvelously delivered his seed from the bondage and tyranny of Pharaoh; to them God gave laws, constitutions, and ceremonies.**

<b>We Hear God's Word</b>
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**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION:** (Unison)

**God, source of all light, by your Word you give light to the soul. Pour out on us the spirit of wisdom and understanding that our hearts and minds may be opened.  
Amen.**

**HEBREW BIBLE LESSON:** *Exodus 15:1-13, 20-21*

**EPISTLE LESSON:** *Romans 14:7-12*

**GOSPEL LESSON:** *Matthew 18:21-22*

**SERMON:** How Can I Keep From Singing?

**MEDITATION TO MUSIC** *O How I Love Jesus* Robert J. Hughes

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

### LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen**

## OFFERTORY INVITATION:

Leader: Someday we will sing again. It will be a glorious day of joy. Until then, let us keep faith and hold fast to hope. Let us give our tithes and offerings so that we can support each other and our community in this difficult season. If you are worshiping here today, you can place your offering in the plate as you leave. If you are worshiping remotely, I encourage you to mail in checks or take advantage of our online giving options through the website. Now let us take a moment to reflect on stewardship.

## DOXOLOGY (Instrumental)

## PRAYER OF DEDICATION: (Unison)

**Great Jehovah, we dedicate these gifts to you with faith that you are with us still, making a way for us where we see no way. Guide us as we use them to support each other and this community. We pray in the name of your son Jesus Christ. Amen.**

<b>We Go Into the World</b>
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## BENEDICTION

**POSTLUDE**     *Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah*             John Hughes/arr. Don Hustad

<b>Life of the Church</b>
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## Announcements

- **YOUTH GROUP** will meet today immediately after church. We will have a faith lesson and some other fun activities. We plan to be done by 1:00. Come with ideas for service projects and fun things that you would like to do this year. As always bring your enthusiasm and maybe a friend. Meetings will be every other week and outside if possible.
- **BRING YOUR OWN BIBLE** Starting this Wednesday evening, September 16, from 7:00-8:00 PM, we will have a virtual Bible Study on today's reading from *Exodus*. Look out for an email with Zoom information. If you do not have email, please call the church office for details on how to join by phone.
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## Opportunities to serve as the HEART, HANDS, and FEET of Jesus Christ:

- **BLESSING BOX** – Our Blessing Box has gained even more importance in this season of pandemic. Economic impacts are on the rise, and the most vulnerable in our midst are the most harmed. Please continue to place items in the Blessing Box and take items if you are a person in need! Items most commonly donated: Canned goods with pull tabs, socks, toilet paper, non-perishable foods, small snacks, toiletries, baby wipes and diapers. Please check expiration dates on food items before donating them.

## **PRAYER LIST**

Anthony  
Alaina  
Marge Ashton  
Avery  
Bapst Family  
Betsy  
Brady Vanes  
Sonny Buono  
Ina Chappell  
Connor  
Dakota  
Danielle  
Dave  
George Griner  
Guy  
Gracie Helmer  
Bill Holmes  
Daniel Litwicki  
Frank  
Kathy Pumnea  
Mary  
Family of Thierno Bah

Jessica  
Janet Orem  
Josh Orem  
Sharon Orem  
Mildred  
Jill Muller  
Jeanne Nestor  
Mary & Gary  
Mike Bennett  
Rodney  
Calvin Scott  
Richard Simmons  
Jay Smith  
Bonita Sutton  
Steve & Melinda  
Gary Studer  
Tarsha  
Richard Terpstra  
Dennis VanKooten  
Mattie Welch  
Cindy Waltz Family  
Laura Buono Domsic  
Susan Hanley  
McKnight Family

**Exodus 15:1-13, 21-22**

**15** Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:

“I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;

horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.

**2** The Lord is my strength and my might,

and he has become my salvation;

this is my God, and I will praise him,

my father’s God, and I will exalt him.

**3** The Lord is a warrior;

the Lord is his name.

**4** “Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he cast into the sea;

his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea.

**5** The floods covered them;

they went down into the depths like a stone.

**6** Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power—

your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy.

**7** In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries;

you sent out your fury, it consumed them like stubble.

**8** At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up,

the floods stood up in a heap;

the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.

**9** The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake,

I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them.

I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.’

**10** You blew with your wind, the sea covered them;

they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

**11** “Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?

Who is like you, majestic in holiness,  
awesome in splendor, doing wonders?

**12** You stretched out your right hand,  
the earth swallowed them.

**13** “In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed;  
you guided them by your strength to your holy abode.

**20** Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. **21** And Miriam sang to them:

“Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.”

#### **Romans 14:7-12**

**7** We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. **8** If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. **9** For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. **10** Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. **11** For it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.” **12** So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

#### **Matthew 18:21-22**

**21** Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” **22** Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

## How Can I Keep From Singing?

*Exodus 15:1-13, 20-21; Psalm 114; Romans 14:7-12; Matthew 18:21-22*

After hardening his heart so many times throughout the plagues in his contest against God for the hearts and minds of the people, Pharaoh, Pharaoh finally let the people go. The final plague, the death of all the firstborns whose homes had not been marked with the mark of the Passover, finally shook him out of indifference, finally sensitized him, finally broke through his defenses, finally reminded him that change was not the greatest thing to fear after all. As it says in *Exodus* chapter 12, “Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his officials and all the Egyptians; and there was a loud cry in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead. Then he summoned Moses and Aaron in the night, and said, ‘Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord, as you said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone. And bring a blessing on me too!’”

So 600,000 Israelite men plus at least as many women plus many more children began their exodus out of Egypt. The Israelites had been in Egypt for 430 years, from the time of Joseph. And though the Egyptians had forgotten Joseph, the traumatized dreamer who saved thousands from famine, the Israelites never forgot. Moses carried Joseph’s bones, mummified in the Egyptian way, as they left for liberation, so that Joseph’s final resting place would be back among his people in the promised land. As this vast multitude of people began their journey out of slavery, “the LORD went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.”

But when they reached the Sea of Reeds, the farthest boundary separating Egypt from the land of the Canaanites, Pharaoh had one last episode of heart hardening. He caught word that the great crowd of Israelites was on the edge of the wilderness, and he said ‘What have we done, letting Israel leave our service?’ So he had his chariot made ready, and took his army with him; he took six hundred picked chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.” This force of horse-drawn chariots bearing the best trained forces of the mighty military of the mightiest empire on earth rushed to the Sea of Reeds and came upon this massive, milling crowd of Israelite families, only recently liberated from the crushing reality of slavery. The Israelites were trapped between these violent warriors and the water. They looked back in great fear and cried out to the LORD. Then they turned to Moses and began a refrain that would come up again and again during their journey through the wilderness.

It was a refrain that reflected the bitterness deep within their bones. They said to Moses, Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians ? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” Uffffffff, those words hurt! I recognize them in myself so frequently. I encounter them in our society so regularly. When the process of liberation gets tough, when we long for the status quo even when the status quo was clearly toxic, when the very possibility of transformation terrifies us, we cry out: “If only we could go back to the way things were!” If we are honest with ourselves, this very cry has been on the tip of most of our tongues over the past several months.

But great Jehovah is a God of liberation and transformation. The great “I AM,” guides us forward and makes a way even when we think there is no way. And so Jehovah, manifest as a great pillar of cloud and fire—a fire previously burning in a bush without consuming it—moved between the Israelites and Pharaoh’s warriors. And this great Jehovah who was guiding the Israelites through their liberation told Moses to lift up his staff and to stretch his hand out over the waters of the Sea of Reeds. Moses did so, and wonder of wonders, “The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.” Take a moment to imagine towering walls of roiling seawater to your left and right. Imagine the sheer weight of it, the sheer force of it. Imagine the spray of mist on your skin. Imagine the sounds of the wind rushing to keep the waters separate. Imagine the feel of the sand beneath your feet, on this holy ground that has never been touched by feet before. When the Israelites had made their wondrous, awe-filled journey across the sea, the walls of water collapsed, covering the Egyptian warriors. And the Israelites were saved. The Israelites were free.

And suddenly there was a sound coming from where the women were gathered. The tambourines were shaking, and Miriam the great prophetess stood in their midst and sang out: “Sing to Jehovah, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.” This song is one of the most ancient texts in all of our scriptures, preserved through centuries of oral Hebrew and then recorded in the text of the book of *Exodus*. And so the great prophetess has sung of liberation and transformation throughout the ages. But who is this great prophetess, this Miriam? None other than the sister of Moses and Aaron!

It was she who, as a young child, followed a basket bearing her newborn brother along the banks of the mighty Nile, to make sure he would live. It was she who suggested to Pharaoh’s daughter that the baby’s own mother be his wet nurse, to make sure that he would know the love of his mother and thus the love of his people. From that time along the banks of the Nile to this time standing on the banks of the Sea of Reeds, she had kept back her song. She had bided her time. She had suffered along with her people through decades of forced labor, making bricks of clay and building structures as Pharaoh’s heart became encased in an ever-hardening clay brick itself. She had watched with dismay as her brother fled to Midian, fearing that Moses had abandoned the people after all. In other words, she had gone through an excruciatingly painful period of life for herself and for her people. With bones full of bitterness and spirits close to breaking, the people did not have reason to sing songs of joy and triumph. But I can see Miriam biting her tongue and gulping back the strains of song every so often when she saw visions of hope, being the prophetess that she was. And then on that glorious day, standing beside a sea that had stood aside for her and her people, thinking back on the incredible courage of women like Shiprah and Puah and her mother who had set the course for liberation with their acts of resistance, remembering that same Moses floating in a basket who stood with hand outstretched separating the waters, the song finally burst forth in full brilliance.

Friends, we are still in the midst of a period of life that is excruciatingly painful for us people. We have lost the warmth of fellow human touch. We have lost any sense of certainty we may have once had. We have lost our illusions of health and safety. We have lost employment and income. We have lost loved ones. As has been the case with our lives, so also has been the case with our worship. We have lost rituals that bind us together, that give us strength and resilience, that comfort us. Each and every one of us has felt it keenly, I know! We have missed times of fellowship. We have missed conversations over coffee and cake. We have missed the

physical presence of our wise, beloved elders. We have missed hugs and handshakes. We have missed prayers spoken aloud. And the one that really gets me in the gut, we have missed singing. And it is so stinking hard! It is hard to feel whole when so much is missing. It is hard to feel those empty holes within us. It is hard to face an uncertain future without the touchstones that have always gotten us through the hard times. I imagine this feeling of loss is similar to the feeling of that milling mass of Israelites huddling between a mighty military and mighty sea— hopes and dreams and faith all lost.

May we remember that great Jehovah made a way where there was no way. The milling mass of Israelites was neither slaughtered nor re-enslaved. They met liberation, ensuring a future that would ultimately birth a messiah who would give liberation to all. The mighty winds blew, and the waters separated, and the Israelites walked out onto holy ground, and they made it through. And when they were on the other side, a song burst forth from deep within the breast of Miriam. It pierced through all else. And tambourines shook. And bodies danced. And there was joy. Friends, with great Jehovah as our guide, we will make it through this season, no matter how long it may last. Remember how Miriam never lost hope through all those years. I close with these words written by Pauline T. and put to music by Robert Lowry. I speak them now but will sing them once we have made it through to the other side!

“My life flows on in endless song;  
Above earth's lamentation,  
I hear the sweet, tho' far-off hymn  
That hails a new creation;  
Thro' all the tumult and the strife  
I hear the music ringing;  
It finds an echo in my soul—  
How can I keep from singing?”

What tho' my joys and comforts die?  
The Lord my Saviour liveth;  
What tho' the darkness gather round?  
Songs in the night he giveth.  
No storm can shake my inmost calm  
While to that refuge clinging;  
Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth,  
How can I keep from singing?”

Amen.