

Wm Blake Spencer

Walls of Water

Exodus 14: 19-31/Romans 6:1-13

Have you ever wanted to be in two places at one time? Two places with people and experiences you wanted to be part of. Do you know that feeling....wanting to be two places at one time? I remember planning for vacation with my family when I was a teenager. It didn't take us long to start counting the days until we could pack the old station wagon and begin driving to the beach.

The month prior to the trip.....our dinner table conversation was filled with all the things we loved about the beach: building sand castles, diving into waves, fast walk races, finding shells, and sleeping with the windows open letting the salty gulf breeze blow through the cabin. Each word created a flood of anticipation making the wait almost unbearable the closer the day we got to leave came.

It always seems time slows down when waiting. (pause)

And then the anticipation for the beach got interrupted with a phone call a few days prior to our leaving when a friend invited me to go on a weekend trip to an amusement park. "Blake, we have a whole group going.....It's gonna be fun. You have to come!"

Really, a group of my friends going for the weekend....how could I miss something like this.

But how could I mention to my family that it was even a possibility to consider not going to the beach.

But how could I say no to my friends? How could I not be part of something my they would talk about and savor for months to come? Why does this happen? Nothing much going on in one moment in life and then all the sudden two places I wanted to be at one time.

Why does life have to be so complicated? Why can't everything be scheduled so we don't have to miss out on things we want to do? Why can't we be two places at one time?

In our minds we know it is not possible. We can't be in two places at one time. But in our hearts, well that's an entirely different story. Our hearts are often divided throughout our life journey. Our love and yearning can be in two places at once.

I'm here but I remember being there and I long for what I had.

I'm here but I can't wait to be there, I yearn for what is not yet to be.

It's easy to believe we are the only ones in this predicament....this bombardment of love and yearning to be where we currently are not.

Why can't our loving and yearning and hoping all find a home in the same place at the same time? And....When will all the pieces of our life fit together to tell the whole story we so long to know and live?

In our minds we know the realities of time and space.

But in our hearts, we remain wanderers on a journey.

In our hearts, we carry beloved snapshots of rich memories and sometimes the weight of baggage we'd rather not carry of past realities....while at the same time carrying hope and anticipation for the life just ahead.

This is the reality of our *heart-filled* wandering.

As much as we want to land in the Garden of Eden, we've lived long enough to know we only get momentary glimpses of paradise, because life is experienced one step at a time right where we are.

We're here no longer there....but not yet where we want to be either.

I suppose this is why we gravitate to stories like this one in Exodus where God's people are at a particular moment in life when their hearts are being yanked into two different directions. We pick up the story this morning right when it becomes clear that safe passage is a reality.

The threat of the past in the land of Egypt gives way to the peace and hope of a future in a land of promise.

Before the eyes of the former Hebrew slaves.... the waters of the sea part.....and in a moment defined as a miracle.....it is as if God's people have the ability to be in two places at once. One moment they are doomed to death....the next moment they are safe on the other side.

It all seems unreal.....walking between walls of water on dry land in the middle of the sea....

and it is unreal if we jump too quickly to the miracle rescue - happy ending. That is why it is important to back up for just a moment.....to stand in the sandals of God's people just prior to the parting of water.

We need to put our minds and hearts in that moment when all there is before us.....is sea water rolling up on the shore.....and all there is behind us is the approaching army of the Pharaoh.

We need to stand in their predicament before this story can offer wisdom and courage to know where we are.....and where we are going.

Here's the deal.....we do ourselves a disservice when we turn the stories of Scripture into trite tales with happy endings. Though the stories we inherit in scripture **are filled with promise, they also are rich with the stuff of life....filled with the paragraphs and chapters proceeding safe passage to a land of milk and honey and promise.**

These stories of God and God's people are about the unfolding of an everlasting covenant....a covenant embracing **every** aspect of our lives....a covenant made genuine because God proves from one generation to the next....knowledge of what it is like to want more than anything to be in two places at one time.....

God knows what it means to live in and through all the paragraphs and chapters of life....

God knows the longing to discover a way into new hope. God knows we long for familiar safety and new realities at the very same time.

So here at the edge of the Red Sea.....God's people stand trapped between water and a past they are trying to escape. Behind them is the drudgery of slavery.....in front of them is a future dripping like sweet honey with promise....and it is in this moment....this *in between* moment....*this here and there* perspective where we discover our own stories.

It is in the waiting and anticipation when we ponder what we would do if we were the ones trapped between the sea and the Egyptians.....

Will we take the risk and jump into the water and swim like we never have.... even with the prospect we might not make it?

Or will we turn back and willingly walk back into the past where we know our lives were not and mostly likely will continue not to be fulfilled?

We hear both sides of the story in this Exodus story. Some were ready to risk it all and go forward....some trusted beyond all hope that there was a place ahead better than where they had been.

While others wailed and cried, "We might as well go back. We were slaves there we know....but at least we had something to eat....and we had somewhere to rest.....and we knew what to expect even if it wasn't the life of our dreams and hopes."

These are the paragraphs and the chapters of scripture revealing the depth of the story. Without these grumbling questions we can never really know the joy of safe passage....we can never really experience the joy of walking into the land of milk and honey....we can never really grasp the life of the empty tomb.

(Pause)

I'll never forget his comment. The choir had been diligently practicing a series of songs for the upcoming *Maundy Thursday* services. The Director of Music had carefully chosen music to tell each part of the story as she did ever year.

The last supper, washing of feet, prayers and tears in the garden, arrest.....and the concluding darkness that comes when pondering the agony and the death of the cross. We sang these kinds of songs every year.....and every year the Director of Music would cry. She could never get through the music without crying. And when her tears started....he spoke. We were taking a break while she wiped the tears from her eyes.

“Do we have to do this music? I mean why do we even have to do this worship service. All we do is cry. It’s all so sad. This is not why I come to church. I come for Easter. It’s about Easter joy! It’s not about this darkness all these songs drone about.”

His words gave us a jolt....he was adamant and rather loud.

But we must have understood what was happening. On the front side of the choir loft our Director of Music was caught up in all the words that come with the paragraphs and chapters just prior to Easter morning....

even with tears in her eyes.....she knew that Easter joy meant very little without the stories and songs of Maundy Thursday.....she knew that Easter had very little significance if it had nothing to do with the pain and tears that come with both life and death.

And on the back side of the choir loft he spoke saying things we had heard before....but also speaking the reality we all wait for.

We knew attendance at the Maundy Thursday service was puny.....that the music and darkness of the night didn’t have the appeal to the lilies and light of Easter.

We also knew the grief he was living.....the sadness that comes when someone you love dies. He wasn’t only talking about our songs. He was talking about his life. He didn’t want to sit in his story.

It was too painful. He wanted to jump into Easter and not think or feel the chapters and paragraphs he was currently living. He wanted to be somewhere he was not. He looked up at us and all he could see was the prospect of promise.

On one side tears reminded us where we have been. On the other side the whisper and longing for Easter. We were in between their stories.

We were in two places at one time.

We were filled with awe that comes with the stories of Holy week.....

we were also filled with expectation.... waiting for that moment when joy will be the only reality.

It was our Lent story...waiting, pondering, thinking...speaking. Looking back, looking ahead....letting go and grabbing hold of.

It is in Lent we discover God in two places at one time. Behind us with all the past brings.....and before us with all the future has to give.

The question now is how to best use these days of Lent. How best do we lean into the promise right where we are?