

May 18, 2014 “What The Eyes May See” Exodus 14:21-31

In Dicken’s classic Christmas tale, the ghost of Jacob Marley asks Scrooge why he doesn’t believe what he sees with his eyes. Scrooge replies that the eyes can deceive. That the ghost of Marley may in fact be an undigested bit of beef....that there is more of gravy than grave about the ghost. We have all heard the stories. The discrepancy between well meaning witnesses and what actually happened. In fact one of the chief criticisms offered by critics of the gospels is the unreliability of testimony offered by people who were there and want to tell us what they saw.

Exodus 14 gives us an opportunity to see what happened from at least 2 points of view. The doubters who are not looking for the hand of Almighty God to reveal His majesty on the battlefield. And the view of the Hebrew population who have been convinced to some degree by Moses that God loves them still, has remembered them in their anguish in Egypt, and has intervened on their behalf to save them when their eyes and their logic told them all was lost.

The Scripture is very specific as to the means used by God to miraculously drive back the waters of the sea and to give His people dry ground on which to cross. If the Egyptians had been in the Hebrew encampment they would have seen Moses stretching out his arm and his hand over the sea. It was

what God told Moses to do! And then (and for those of us who are old enough to remember Cecil B. DeMille's portrayal on film) the sky grows dark. After all, as the Bible says this happened during the night. A mighty wind begins to blow out of the East, and it continues to blow all night long.

This is not a breeze. It is a storm of epic proportions. It affects everything. It is a wind the sound of which proclaims power. It drives the water back from its normal place covering the sea bed. In fact it dramatically divides the water, throwing it back upon itself in what looks like the creation of walls. And between those walls a road, a highway, a route straight as can be from one side of the water to the other. But here is the key. What the Egyptian tactical leadership sees is wind and storm....a rather weird phenomenon to be sure, but wind and storm.

Here is the remarkable part....the Hebrews see the hand of God moving on the face of the water so as to deliver them in their hour of peril. What is remarkable about that is that the Hebrews have not shown themselves to be giants when it comes to faith. They have criticized Moses at every single point of difficulty. And they will continue to criticize his leadership. They will continually question whether or not God is with them. They won't like the food. They won't like the

water. They will sound very much like us when things do not go the way we would make things go if we were in charge!

And yet here at the shore of the sea....reedy or Red....they remember the stories they have been taught about God creating the heavens and the earth. They remember that God 's Spirit hovered over the water in the act of creating. They remember that God created the man out of the dust of the earth, woman from the rib of the man. Here on this stormy night they see more than a change in the weather. They see more than bad weather. For some of them it is no more faith than a grain of mustard seed if you are weighing it by the pound. And yet it is enough faith to move a mountain, to see a miracle, to see that God is on the scene and therefore God's people are not alone.

And so according to the command and the will of God Moses herds his flock on to this road of desperation. They seize the moment. They run for their lives across a chanel of sea bed that has become dry enough that they can use it like a road. The walls of water on either side. The thunder of the wind and the churning sea that sustains this division. And in the midst of the "wows", the praise Gods, and the hallelujahs....the Hebrews think they are going to make good their escape. That is what faith sees.

The Egyptian commanders see something else. They are escaping! How dare they! The Strategists were wise enough to watch and wait. And this is what they see. This phenomenon with the wind, however it works, is stable. The Sea is doing that thing. The wind is continuing to blow. The slaves are not even getting wet. And finally they decide if it works for them, it will work for us. The order is given and Egyptians pursue the Hebrews down onto the seabed. If they cannot capture the Hebrews, they will kill as many as they can. They are angry. They intend to make the Hebrews pay. But what they see....is it works for them, it will work for us.

This is one of the details, Cecil B. DeMille did get right. The Hebrews reach the other side. They scramble up off the dry sea bed. The whole of this strike force from Egypt ...chariots, cavalry, soldiers in their battle gear are on that road that runs from shore to shore. Then stuff starts going wrong. Wheels come off some of the chariots. There are delays in what should be a precise military operation. There is a point where someone high up the command structure literally recognizes this is not going as planned. There is an attempt to go back.

The sunrise makes it obvious the weather has changed. The storm that had been blowing all night is not blowing anymore. The walls of water collapse. The sea returns to its normal place. And one of the great military machines of

the ancient world is literally wiped away by God's unchanging hand. I mean you really have to grasp what has happened. The economy of Egypt was about to go into recession because of the loss of the slave workforce. But in the attempt to bring them back, to make them slaves again, suddenly Egypt has lost the major forces that have sustained Empire with an iron fist. No pun intended there has been a sea change in the power structures of the world...an Empire suddenly is not capable not only of producing what it produced, but protecting its very nature.

And again....what the Egyptians saw was a change in the weather. There was a moment when there was a realization that the God who took the first born of Egypt....that was how Egypt arrived at the point of wanting the Hebrews gone.....that God of theirs is fighting for them. There will be no going back to the way things were. In fact the way ahead for Egypt involves ruin.

Of course the Hebrews can see for the moment, what we all tend to see in a mountain top faith in God building experience. Suddenly everyone understands. It is God, Moses and us against the world! A moment for high fives.

But of course it is not just a matter of what the Egyptians see, or what the Hebrews see is it? No there is the deep, deep, question what do we see? Hopefully we see that

God is the God who does miracles and in the midst of redeeming those whom He has called to serve Him also passes judgement on those who do not bow before Him. Those who believe in God, in Christ, in the Holy Spirit should be able to see this is a story about both the grace of God and the judgement of God. And we ought to be able to see as well, that there is no such thing as an impossible situation or circumstance where God is concerned. Believers are not just called to think outside the box, but to realize regardless of what we think are the only alternatives.....God may have something greater and bigger and far more mind blowing in store than anything we thought possible.

In many ways this series is about my finding an old hymn as part of the music score of one of my favourite westerns. You can ask Barbara. I own the book...True Grit. My family knows I watched the film starring John Wayne about 50 times. When that film was remade starring Jeff Bridges I went to see it with fear and trembling as to what they might have done to an old favourite...only to discover something new.

At the heart of that story is a concept that is often forgotten, denied and simply not taken seriously in these times. COVET NOT THIS WORLD'S VAIN RICHES/ THAT SO RAPIDLY DECAY/ SEEK TO GAIN THE HEAVENLY TREASURES; / THEY WILL NEVER PASS AWAY/ HOLD TO GOD'S UNCHANGING HAND/

HOLD TO GOD'S UNCHANGING HAND/ BUILD YOUR HOPES ON THINGS ETERNAL/ HOLD TO GOD'S UNCHANGING HAND.

[Let](#) us pray;

Heavenly Father, Redeeming and ever present Lord, we thank you for moments when our faith is so strong that all we want to do is praise your name and engage the work that bears your name. We also thank you that when we are weak, we can be really strong if we bow before you, remember you and seek to discover your will anew for us. Help us every day and in every way to seek to be holding to your wonderful, **gracious** and unchanging hand. Amen