

## “Between a Rock and a God Place”

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Based on Exodus 14

Rev. Kimberly Heath  
Wall Street United Church

Stuck *between a rock and a God place*. We've all been in a difficult place where we feel pretty helpless and we're really not sure how to get out. That may be something as minor as meeting a deadline that looks impossible, or as major as needing to start a new life without alcohol, without that relationship, without that job or with the diagnosis of illness or disability for you or someone you love. At a fork on an unknown road. Or, at a dead end and at a loss. That's where the Israelites were as they stood on a beach. They couldn't go forward; there was too much water and they couldn't swim. They didn't want to go back to the slavery they'd just escaped from and they weren't going to get anywhere along the beach with a mighty army on their heels. The story of the Exodus is one of best known stories in the Bible. It's not just a good story -- it's the event that shaped the Jewish people. The Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, goes back to that event over and over. And for good reason, because one of the best things to do when you're lost is to remember the last time you were in this situation. Or more specifically to remember who was there with you and who led you out.

### 1. **Remember that God is there:**

It would have helped the Israelites to remember how they got to Egypt in the first place. Through the whole story God is there and part of it. Remember how Joseph, the 'Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat' guy, ends up being sold into slavery by his jealous brothers and by the grace of God he ends up second in command to the Pharaoh? Because of a wide-spread famine, he brings his very large extended family from the land of Canaan to live in Egypt where he can provide for them. It was God in the first place who brought them into Egypt. When Joseph's brothers are falling at his feet begging for forgiveness, Joseph says to them:

"You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." (Gen 50:20).

So they lived and prospered for many, many years in Egypt.

Most of us suffer from memory problems, especially as we get older or busier. Two elderly couples were enjoying friendly conversation when one of the men asked the other, "Fred, how was the memory clinic you went to last month?" "Outstanding," Fred replied. "They taught us all the latest psychological techniques - visualization, association - it has made a big difference for me." "That's great! What was the name of that clinic?" Fred went blank. He thought and thought but couldn't remember. Then a smile broke across his face and he asked, "What do you call that flower with the long stem and thorns?" "You mean a rose?" "Yes, that's it!" Then he turned to his wife and asked, "Rose, what was the name of that clinic?"

In difficult times the most important thing to do is to *remember* that God has been and is and will continue to be with you forever.

### 2. **You may be where you are meant to be:**

The second thing lesson of the Exodus is that you are where God wants you to be. That's a tough one to believe. You are where you are for a reason. It might have been your own doing that got you there through an addiction or a bad life choice or it might be life circumstance that has seen you laid off from a job or in a stressful relationship or in a deteriorating health condition. But if you let God into that space you will begin to see God at work in it: even while you're still in it. Understand that I'm not saying that God causes the bad stuff that happens in our lives, but life is hard and God will use life events to shape us, give us strength and most of all deepen our faith. There may be something that God wants you to learn while you are there. Like Joseph sold into slavery, there may be a person or people that you are called to help that you would not have been able to had you not been in the difficult place.

### 3. **Be aware of the enemy and your surroundings but keep your focus on God:**

When you are in that *between a rock and a God space* be aware of the enemy that is coming up behind you, but keep your focus on God. If you turn around and focus on the enemy—focus on the problem—that's when fear and panic can take a total

strangle hold on you. I'm not saying be in denial, just be aware of the reality of your situation, and focus on the one who can lead you out.

In 1525, Martin Luther tried to lead the Roman Catholic Church out of some corruption and back to its roots. He ended up being excommunicated by the church and he found himself surrounded by enemies on all sides and his life threatened. Despair and discouragement infected him. His friends tried to get him out of his depression, but couldn't. One day he came home and found his wife Catherine wearing a funeral dress and weeping in grief. Luther asked her, "Catherine, who died?" She said, "God is dead, and I can't bear it; all his work is overthrown." Luther was shocked at hearing what could only be described as blasphemy from his wife's mouth. To which Catherine responded, "Well, you've been going around acting as if God were dead, as if God no longer was here to keep us. So I thought I should join the funeral and your bereavement." Catherine's remark struck home. Luther realized he had taken his eyes off the Redeemer. He had to be reminded that it is God who gives the victory, to be reminded that the future belongs to God.

#### **4. Surrender your way to God's way:**

So don't keep staring at the problem, but don't start staring at the solution either. At least don't focus on what *you think* the solution is. Focus on God and surrender how you want this fixed to how God wants to deal with the problem. When the Israelites were crying out to God for an end to slavery, my guess is that crossing through a sea with walls of water on either side was probably not what they were imagining. Trust God to answer in God's own way and in God's own time. There is a way through whatever you're going through, but don't assume it's your way. More than on the problem, more than on "the solution" or your comfort, you need to focus on God. It's only as we die to ourselves that we will find the life that God is giving to us. How do you do that? Well prayer is a good start. I always recommend that you get your prayers out. It's easier to hear God if you pray out loud or in a journal. Read your Bible. Come and sit in the Sanctuary during the week when everything is quiet. Talk to a trusted Christian friend or counsellor. Bob and Shelley Bales have a prayer ministry for people with problems or addictions that brings God into the situation and focuses on healing rather than on managing the problem. Do what you can to focus on the One who will lead you through the crisis.

When we look at the problem through the lens of God it is easier to see it in perspective. It may seem massive to us, but it is not such a big problem for God. At one point the famous English preacher, Charles Spurgeon, was tremendously concerned about his ministry in the city of London and about whether there were enough resources to keep the ministry going. He became depressed and filled with anxiety. When he came to God in prayer, God filled his mind with an image that made his anxieties and worries so insignificant. God gave him the image of a mouse in the large grain bins of Egypt under the leadership of Joseph. The mouse was worried about having enough to eat. Then in Spurgeon's mind came the image of a fish in the great river in London and how the fish worried about having enough water to breath and survive. As the images sank deep inside of Spurgeon he began to laugh and said, "Eat away little mouse, swim away little fish. God will provide all we need and more." And then addressing himself, he said, "Stop worrying little man, God has enough and more!"

#### **5. Thank and praise God:**

Remember to give thanks and praise God even before the waters part and you know the way. Being thankful helps to take the attention off us and off our problem and to see it in the bigger picture of God's providence. Many of you know the old hymn: "Now Thank We All Our God." This hymn was written during the Thirty Years War in Germany, in the early 1600s. Its author was Martin Rinkart, a Lutheran pastor in the town of Eilenburg in Saxony. Eilenburg was a walled city, so it became a haven for refugees seeking safety from the fighting. But soon, the city became too crowded and food was in short supply. Then, a famine hit and a terrible plague and Eilenburg became a giant morgue. In one year alone, Pastor Rinkart conducted funerals for 4,500 people, including his own wife. The war dragged on; the suffering continued. Yet through it all, he kept his focus on God and was able to give thanks. It was during the darkest days of Eilenburg's agony that he wrote the hymn:

*Now thank we all our God,  
with hearts and hands and voices,  
Who wondrous things hath done,  
In whom the world rejoices*

*...[So] keep us in His grace,  
and guide us when perplexed,  
and free us from all ills,  
in this world and the next.*

It seems extraordinary that he could write such a hymn at such a time, but the truth is, there's a part of me that understands how he could. I don't think it was so much that he was a man of super-human faith. It's that sometimes when we've hit the bottom and when things are most hopeless, that's often when we really open the door wide to God's presence. It can be just like opening an outside door to a dark shack -- the light just floods in! And you feel it.

It is often when we are most troubled that we can feel God's presence so tangibly. I have had that experience of feeling God's love powerfully during times of great stress, more powerfully than during "ordinary times". And you are filled with thanksgiving. You can't help but respond with praise when light and love floods you and the fear is gone even if it's just for a short time. Those experiences of the power of God are amazing. I often wish we could have a time of sharing because I know you would be so encouraged. If you have had one of those between-a-rock-but-definitely-in-a-God-space moments, tell someone about it today during coffee hour or this week so that you and another can be encouraged. They are a tiny glimpse of what is to come when we cross through the river on dry land from this life to the next and into the Promised Land.

Here are the lyrics to a song sent to me just yesterday by a friend. I have not even heard the tune yet but the words just fit so perfectly for today:

**"Where You Are" by Rich Mullins.**

*Talkin' Daniel in the den of the lions  
Talkin' Jonah in the belly of a whale  
Talkin' three Hebrew children  
And they're standing in a furnace, fiery furnace  
But the fire didn't burn them and the lions didn't bite  
And the Lord reached down and you can be sure that  
Everything turned out right  
Oh you'll meet the Lord in the furnace  
A long time before you meet Him in the sky  
And where you are ain't where you wish that you was  
Well your life ain't easy and the road is rough  
But where you are is where He promised to be  
From the ends of the world to every point of need (Repeat)*

Where you are however grim it may seem  
This is real life baby  
This ain't no Hollywood dream  
And where you are no matter what you may face  
You're gonna find out real soon what they mean when they say (Refrain)

*But the fire won't burn you and the lions won't bite  
And the Lord will reach down and you can be sure that  
Everything will turn out alright  
Oh you'll meet the Lord in the furnace  
A long time before you meet Him in the sky  
Then you'll meet Him in the sky*

No matter where you are or how you got there, God is there. God is here. Do not be afraid. Open the door to his presence and let his light and love fill you and lead you home. Thanks be to God.