

The Israelites, as a people, were not satisfied very easily or for very long. They would have enjoyed the Paula Abdul song "What have you done for me lately." After all, God had helped them to escape from Egypt. God had sent one plague after another upon the Egyptians until they let the slaves go. God had positioned God's cloud ahead to guide them and his angel behind to protect them. But, when they found their way blocked by the Red Sea, they cried out: "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you treated us this way, to bring us out of Egypt?" (14:11).(pause)

But God parted the waters, and the Israelites escaped. The Egyptians followed. Soon the Israelites were watching their enemies floating on the tide and washing up on the beach. Wouldn't you think that the Israelites would get the picture, but they looked around to find themselves surrounded by desert and complained: "We wish that we had died by the hand of Yahweh in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots, when we ate our fill of bread, for you have brought us out

into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (16:3).

(pause) Not the most appreciative people in the world. **No matter** what God had done for them yesterday, they remained skeptical about what God would do for them today. **No matter** what miracles they had seen in the past, they could not believe that God had one more in God’s repertoire.

It reminds me of a Woody Allen line. “How can I believe in God when just last week I got my tongue caught in the roller of a typewriter.” Perhaps I am dating myself here. In this age of computers, nobody uses typewriters anymore. I am confident that nobody in this congregation has gotten their tongue caught in a typewriter roller anytime recently. The computer has delivered us from the perils of typewriter rollers. But, on the other hand, we all get our tongues caught in a typewriter roller—at least in a figurative sense. Most of life is “two steps forward—one step back,” but we all have days when it is “one step forward—two steps back.” Sometimes we don’t even get to take one step forward. (pause) It’s like a boxer when they are on the ropes. The ropes keep them on their feet while the opponent delivers one punishing blow after another.

And sometimes life is like that! Our child gets sick, so we start to take her to the doctor. Then the car won't start. Then we try to go back into the house—only to discover that we have locked our keys in the car. And then it starts to rain. And then we step in a puddle, and our shoe fills with water. We all have bad days!

That was the kind of day/season the Israelites were experiencing. They had been through a lot. The Egyptians had beaten them and worked them to death. Pharaoh had killed their babies. Then Moses had offered to lead them out of slavery and into the Promised Land. So, they departed Egypt, only to find the Egyptian army in hot pursuit. They found their escape cut short by the Red Sea, and it looked as if they would die. Then, having escaped that danger, they found themselves without food. Six hundred thousand people and no food! (go slow) Moses, Moses, Moses, why didn't you let us die in Egypt? Why put us through all this just so we can starve in the desert? At least, in Egypt, we had plenty to eat! (long pause)

The Israelites threw up their hands in despair. They gave up hope. They were ready to sit down and die. Why try when you can't win? And don't we feel like that sometimes! (Pause)

Harriet Tubman had been born into slavery but escaped on the Underground Railroad. Then she began to help other slaves escape. She made trip after trip deep into the Old South to lead slaves to freedom. Her nickname was "Moses", because she led her people out of slavery. Slave owners posted a \$12,000 reward, not a small sum, for her capture, because she had helped so many slaves escape. She took her life in her hands every time she ventured south of the Mason-Dixon Line.

On one trip, she hid with twenty-five slaves all day in a swamp. They had no food. When it came time to move, one man refused to go. They were all going to die anyway, he said, so he might as well die at home. He did not care that he was jeopardizing the lives of the rest of the group. Suddenly he heard a click and felt the cold steel of a pistol at his temple. He heard Harriet's voice. She didn't shout. She just said, "**Move or die!**"(pause) The man moved!

“**Move or die!**” Moses could have said that! Those would have been good words for the Israelites! “**Move or die!**” After all, what were their options? They could have stayed in Egypt, but soldiers were killing their babies, and the overseers were **working them to death**. Egypt was a **place of death**. They could have fought back, but the Egyptian soldiers would have cut them down. An insurrection was a **plan for death**. Or they could follow Moses, the person whom God had sent to lead them from their slavery. God had a plan—**not for death**, but for **life!**

“**Move or die!**” The Israelites moved! They moved reluctantly, but they moved! Each time their path was blocked, God broke open a pathway for them. Then, when they complained about food, God said: “I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel. Speak to them, saying, ‘At evening you shall eat meat, and in the morning, you shall be filled with bread: and you shall know that I am Yahweh your God’”

(16:12). (pause)

(Softly) “And you shall know that I am Yahweh your God.” The Israelites’ deepest crisis was not a shortage of food, but a shortage of

faith. They had not yet learned to trust God. God would provide them bread for their stomachs and bread for their souls. God would give them food so that they might gain faith. They had not yet learned to trust God. God would meet their needs for food so that they would learn to trust him for all things.

**“Move or die!”** Moses might have said, **“Believe or die!”**

“Believe in God, even when times are tough, and God will save you.” I think sometimes, we need to hear those words as well, because life is seldom easy for God’s people. We all have days where trouble piles upon trouble. We have all sweated through the dark night of the soul. We all experience a taste of the wilderness on our way to the Promised Land.

But God is always there! God was there when we had to move to online only services. God is there, even when the shadows are darkest, ready to break through the clouds to illuminate our pathway. God was there when spring came, and we were able to move out here so we could be together and worship as safely as possible. Whenever we walk in

shadows, those very shadows remind us that God's Light shines on the other side of the clouds. (Pause)

Rosalind Russell was a beautiful movie star several decades ago. She was successful not only in Hollywood but also on Broadway. But perhaps her greatest triumph was her gallant fight against arthritis and cancer. After her death, this little poem was found tucked in her ever-present Bible:

“Trust him when dark doubts assail you.

Trust him when your faith is small,

Trust him when simply to trust him

Is the hardest thing of all.” (long pause)

“Trust him when simply to trust him is the hardest thing of all.” The Israelites began to learn that lesson in Egypt. They had to relearn it when they were trapped by the Red Sea. They had to learn it again when they ran out of food. They had to relearn it time and time again with every new hardship.

And so, do we. (Pause and go slow) Life is full of hardship. But life is also full of God. And so, God calls us to:

“Trust him when dark doubts assail you.

Trust him when your faith is small,

Trust him when simply to trust him

Is the hardest thing of all.” Amen.