

Go Forward

September 13, 2020

Proper 19A

First Reading ~ *Exodus 14: 10-15, 19-31*

As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to YHWH. 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 and work for the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that YHWH will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. YHWH will fight for you, and you have only to keep still."

Then YHWH said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and YHWH 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. The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. At dawn, YHWH looked down upon the Egyptian forces from the column of the fiery cloud, and threw the army onto confusion and panic, clogging their chariot wheels so that they could hardly turn. The Egyptians turned to flee from the Israelites, saying "Their God fights for them against us!"

Then YHWH said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, YHWH tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites passed through, walking on dry ground, with the water like a wall on their right and on their left. Thus YHWH saved Israel that day from the power of Egypt. When Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the seashore, and beheld the great power that YHWH had shown against them, the people held YHWH in awe; and put their faith in YHWH and in Moses, God's trusted servant.

Second Reading ~ from Elizabeth Alexander in “Praise Song for the Day”

I know there's something better down the road.
We need to find a place where we are safe.
We walk into that which we cannot yet see.
Say it plain: that many have died for this day.
Sing the names of the dead who brought us here,
who laid the train tracks, raised the bridges,
picked the cotton and the lettuce, built
brick by brick the glittering edifices
they would then keep clean and work inside of.
Praise song for struggle, praise song for the day.
.... What if the mightiest word is love?
Love beyond marital, filial, national,
love that casts a widening pool of light,
love with no need to pre-empt grievance.
In today's sharp sparkle, this winter air,
any thing can be made, any sentence begun.
On the brink, on the brim, on the cusp,
praise song for walking forward in that light.

Elizabeth Alexander was born on May 30, 1962, in Harlem, New York, and grew up in Washington, D.C. Author of many books and many honors, she has traveled extensively within the United States and abroad, giving poetry readings and lecturing on African American literature and culture.

Third Reading ~ from A. Powell Davies in “Without Apology”

We must push forward – forward to a new and deeper understanding of the spiritual beginning with a full acceptance of it; the spiritual that demands that we deal justly in all our relationships, that we cast aside prejudice, and all escapes and all excuses; the spiritual that calls us from sloth to effort and endurance, and from easy purposes to difficult aims and high endeavors; the spiritual that speaks in conscience; the spiritual that says the soul can only grow by truth and love and righteousness, and that this is written in the laws of ultimate reality, the laws of God – yes, and the spiritual that says that nothing that we can do be availing until the new age has found its soul. For that is what is missing. No civilization can endure without the faith that gives it nurture. And no civilization can be built except by men and women of soul.

Arthur Powell Davies (June 5, 1902 – September 26, 1957) was the minister of All Souls Church, Unitarian in Washington, D.C. from 1944 until his death in 1957. A prolific author of theological books and sermon collections, he came to national prominence in the U.S. through his liberal activism advocating civil rights for African-Americans and women and ethical stands against post-war nuclear proliferation and the methods employed by the American government during the era of McCarthyism.