

**Sermon | Haiti Sunday**  
**Exodus 16:2-15 | The Rev. Barnabas Pusnur | September 24, 2023**

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A very good morning! It's such a joy to gather today to celebrate Haiti Sunday- our annual event focusing on SPR's partnership with St. Patrick's church and school in Haiti. About 10 years ago the leadership of this church had a desire to broaden its vision of ministry. The church was doing well but they had a growing desire to look beyond. The church wanted to explore ways they could partner with a global community and walk the journey of faith and love together. From that desire was born our relationship with St. Patrick's community.

These 10 years have certainly not been easy on this relationship. Natural calamities, political instability, civic unrest, and travel difficulties have all been very hard on our relationship. Pre-covid we had regular and reciprocal visits. Whenever we met, we celebrated life together. We made music together. Now our relationship is long-distance.

Yet, despite the challenges we are not dejected. Both the St. Patrick's community leaders and SPR's Haiti ministry team are resilient. On our end, current team leaders Linda Thisted, Gail Williams, and Kim Hart have kept working hard on this partnership. They have given their time, energy and passion to keep alive the joy of this relationship.

On their end, St. Patrick's community has bravely withstood enormous difficulties and challenges. They have not given up. I was told that St. Patrick's school and church today stand as a beacon of light in the region. Even in trying times this community is a place of hope and inspiration for others.

And yet the journey ahead is not easy and is filled with many unknowns. Today's scripture reading from Exodus is an account of the journey of Israel along with Moses from Egypt into the wilderness. A journey filled with anxiety and unknowns.

There was anxiety whether the people of Israel can truly trust Moses? Is Moses truly leading them to a better life? Whether they will have enough food and water? Moses too had his own anxiety. Could he truly lead these people? They questioned him, challenged him, and constantly complained against him.

Last week we heard the scripture narrating the great episode of God dividing the Red Sea to deliver Israel from Pharaoh's army that was pursuing them. That event is a classic symbol of deliverance. Once on the other side of the waters, Moses and the people sing together celebrating the crossing. Prophet Miriam and the women celebrate with tambourines, dancing, and singing.

They were over-joyed on their deliverance, but the truth was this journey through the night across the parted Red Sea was not smooth. While stuck on the Egyptian side between the pursuing army of Pharaoh and the waters in front of them, the Israelites had serious doubts on Moses. The scripture reads: "As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. 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 so that we can serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."

This kind of accusation must have deeply hurt Moses. Unfortunately, the mistrust between the people of Israel and Moses was to continue. Three days after crossing the Red Sea and walking in the wilderness, the people are again mad at Moses when the only water they find is bitter. They complain at Moses and shout: "What shall we drink?"

The tension would continue even later. A month after their deliverance from Egypt, today's scripture portion reads: "The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and ate our fill of bread, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.""

They were hungry. There were constant doubts and anxieties. This relationship between Moses and the people was strained.

The very next chapter and next week's reading opens this way: "The people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." [Another water crisis!] Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" But the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do for this people? They are almost ready to stone me.""

So, what kept this journey through the wilderness going? What kept this exodus project going? Despite all the difficulties and challenges, Israel as a people group did survive the wilderness and become a covenant people of God. They did not fade away in the sands of the wilderness. They made survived it. It's surprising that after this much mistrust, Moses eventually ends up being a revered leader in Israelite history and tradition.

What worked? How did they survive all the challenges?

Both Moses and the people faced immense difficulties in the wilderness. In addition they often succumbed to their weaknesses. But this deliverance project was neither Moses' nor did it belong to the Israelites. It was

God's. It was God who brought Moses. It was God who brought the Israelites. It was God who provides safety, food, and water through the wilderness. The only hope and guarantee throughout this project was God. God was the one who orchestrated the exodus from Egypt and made sure of the survival in the wilderness so that it could result in something beautiful. God was making something beautiful to celebrate despite all the challenges.

Today, we gather to celebrate something beautiful! We gather to acknowledge the beauty of what God has been creating in our journey with St. Patrick's despite difficulties. Natural calamities, political instability, civic unrest, and travel difficulties may continue to beset our relationship for the time being. The challenges of long-distance may be something we need to deal with for a little longer. But this is God's project. God has brought SPR and St. Patrick's together to make something beautiful.

We gather to celebrate that beautiful work. St. Patrick's has been able to increase the number of students who attend the school. They want to add higher grade classes. Praise be to God for this beautiful thing! SPR wants to increase the number of days a hot lunch is served at the school. It wants to ensure that teachers and the music program flourish. Praise be to God for this beautiful thing!

Today we hear beautiful Haitian music, we will gather after the service in the parish hall for some great Haitian food prepared by our own SPR Haitian parishioner Yanick Rosier. Downstairs we will also hear recorded interviews of a parent, a student, and the music teacher of St. Patrick's community. We will give generously to this partnership. We will celebrate the beauty that God is creating in this journey despite the challenges. God is the source of our confidence. Have a wonderful Haiti Sunday!