

**Sermon Preached
By Doug King
Exodus 5:1-9
Advent I
November 30th 2003**

Well people it is time to shake off that turkey-tryptophan inspired grogginess, welcome to Advent. This is a time of the year when popular culture shouts at us to get busy with gift purchasing, holiday hosting, tree trimming and all other sorts of time consuming high energy merriment. And so perhaps we come to worship to seek a brief reprieve from the hectic melee of it all. The lectionary readings for today would offer us not a moment to catch our breath. They speak of the urgent need for us to scramble around doing the work of the Lord or else, which is why I have left the lectionary for today and have gone to the book of Exodus.

The book of Exodus and its story of the Israelites journey from slavery to freedom is an apt metaphor for our advent journey. In advent we await the arrival of God into our midst, a God who will free us from all that binds us. Jesus the Christ is coming into the world to free us from our broken-ness and our mistakes; from our anxieties and our fears; from the very limits of our humanity and our mortality; from all that keeps us from being loving and joyful people; from all that keeps us from living in a world of peace and justice.

As we prepare to join the Christ on this journey toward emancipation let us look back on the journey to freedom that the Israelites traveled. At this point in the story the Pharoah and Moses are in a tug of war over to whom the Israelites ultimately belong. Are they slaves who owe their allegiance to the Pharoah or are they the people of God who owe their allegiance to Yahweh?

The Pharoah's response to Moses' demand that they be allowed to worship their God is to heap more work upon them, to make their burden and obligation so heavy that they do not have the time and the energy to consider any allegiance at all except the

master of the tasks before them. In the midrashic materials on this text the Pharaoh is quoted as saying "let them take no time for that deep luxurious breathing which generates the life of philosophy, art, and dreams." The Pharaoh knows that if every moment of a person's life is filled with tasks that must be done, there is no place or time in a person's heart and soul for reverie, no time to see the possibility of a different future, to envision being free. The author Avivah Zornberg, in her book The Particulars of Rapture: Reflections on Exodus, states that the society of Egypt was in the grip of a "kind of psychosis." W.R. Bion writes "of the incapacity for reverie which is found in the psychotic, along with incapacity for attention, passing of judgement, memory, and dream-pictures."

For the enslaved people in the land of Egypt they find themselves in the frustrating place of being trapped in the interval between their desire to be free and the fulfillment of this desire. Zornberg writes that "Reverie...is one (tool) which makes bearable the interval between the wish for redemption and its fulfillment. To have that avenue blocked off is to become increasingly frustrated: the state of feeling that the Torah describes as *kotzer ruach*—shortness of spirit, or shortness of breath. Ultimately, the psychotic intolerance of frustration makes for intolerance of reality: the people, unable to breathe deep, to engage in healing reverie, become incapable of hearing the words of Moses" or the word of God. And thus they are unable to respond to the word of God.

I would argue that this is exactly our advent predicament. At a time of our liturgical season when it is vital that we find time to engage in reverie, to dream about the monumental existential implications of the limitless creator of the universe becoming human and mortal for our behalf, we find ourselves too busy to catch our breath. How can we possibly live in the interval between our wish for our Savior God to arrive and heal all that is broken in this world and in our lives and the concrete fulfillment of this wish if we do not take the time to daydream about it once in a while? No wonder this is such a frustrating time of year. The secular world paints an ideal picture of these days as an endless array of the perfectly hosted parties, evenings surrounded by the perfect gathering of devoted, and loving family and friends, the giving and receiving of perfect

cards and gifts, and on and on. And in church we hear word of the need for us to prepare for the coming of our perfectly loving God who will make all things right throughout the world. And as we are scampering around at a pace faster than the speed of light, the reality before us is far from perfect. The less than perfect state of our lives and our families and our warring world and our ability to juggle it all are never more glaring than this time of year. And unless this year is radically different than last year, it is unlikely that come December 25th our God is going to swoop down and concretely heal every last broken one of us.

It is enough to make me frustrated right now just thinking about it. I am not a big fan of this living in the interval between our wishes and their fulfillment. And yet this is where we live. No matter how much we scramble around this season, the perfection will elude us. No matter how busy we are it will not fill the empty chair at the end of the dining room table where a now deceased loved one used to sit. There is no amount of energy that will heal the wounds from broken relationships that are poignant this time of year. And no matter how hard we pray, and how many grocery bags we fill for the needy there is no way of guaranteeing that we are prepared for when our savior will arrive to set the world right.

This does not mean we give up the parties and the grocery bags, the carol singing and the praying, but let's carve out some quiet time this season. Let us take some time to just sit and day dream. We have been given a grand promise from our God. Just as God promised to and then did indeed free the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, we too have been promised a great freedom. We have been promised a savior who will release us from all that binds us up. No longer will we be bound by grief and loss and anger. No longer will we be held captive by fear and loneliness. No longer will the world be trapped in warfare and poverty and racism and injustice.

Just imagine, being healthy and whole and filled with joy. Just imagine, being surrounded by loving kindness in each and every moment. Just imagine, the glory of God self evident in our midst. Just imagine, a world in which there is peace and

prosperity and justice for every last child of God. If we cannot imagine it, how can we participate in its arrival? How can we recognize that our allegiance is not to the parties, or to the presents, or to the endless cycle of activity, but to our living and holy God?

This season allow yourself the gift of reverie once in a while. Breathe deeply, open yourself up to daydreaming about the day when God's promises will be fulfilled. Breathe deeply, take the risk to stop running from place to place just long enough to trust in the promises we have been given. Breathe deeply, let your imagination run wild with the possibilities. Breathe deeply, for unto us a child will indeed be born and his name will be Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Just imagine.