

Exodus 14:14

Week #7 in the Series “Whose Verse is it Anyway?”

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Welcome to St Paul's Church, once again. As you know, my name is Matt. I'm one of the Pastors here, and it is my joy and privilege to share the word of God with you today. I have to be honest, I feel a little bit like a fish out of water at the moment, because this is such a very different process that what I'm used to in preparing messages, so we're going to go on an adventure today. I told this story in the 8:30 Service, and I'm going to share it with you because I think it captures how I'm feeling, even though this is my second attempt today to come together and bring together a message with such a short amount of time. And it goes something like this. I heard this story years ago from another preacher, and I think you'll like it too. The story goes something like this. There's a preacher whose primary role is to fill in for other preachers when they go on vacation. He doesn't have a church of his own. But when a preacher needs someone to fill in, he will go and fill in for that preacher on a Sunday morning. This is before GPS, this is before smartphones. He's trying to find this church in this rather large city. And he is lost. He can't find this church to save his life. And with the time for the service approaching, he gives up and he just says you know what, I'm just going to ask for directions. He drives to a convenience store and he's trying to explain to the clerk where he's trying to go. Another bystander hears the story and says, I know that church, that's my church. If you get in your car, you can follow me, and I'll get you there in no time. It's just right around the corner. You're almost there. Relieved, the preacher gets into his car, follows the helpful servant all the way to the church. He was only a couple of blocks away. He parked his car and runs over to the car that led them there. The man rolled down his window. They exchange a couple of pleasantries, and the preacher says, Well, I'll see you inside. To which the man said, Oh, I'm not going to be there today. We have a guest preacher. I do feel a little like that guest preacher today, a little lost, searching for something to say. This is a very different process than the one I'm used to, but it's really exciting. You see, typically I don't preach every Sunday for St. Paul's; I have the luxury of a little extra time sometimes to prepare messages. I usually sit down in a quiet place when I prepare a message and I write about 3000 words, nonstop, as I'm thinking about the message that that I'll give. Then I have an opportunity to refine several times over. I'm a trained academic, so I usually preach from a manuscript, which is a little different than most. But that's how I was trained and that's where my comfort zone is. But God is pushing. I can feel it. It's like He's pushing me out of my box today. And I'm really excited to see what happens in this second attempt to be with you today. What I love most about “Whose verse is it anyway?”, the message series that we've been in for a number of weeks now, and we're going to be wrapping up here real soon, is that this

message series focuses squarely on the power behind the Word of God. It truly is remarkable text. It is timeless. It has survived so many different iterations through the beauty of translation, we're able to enjoy the word of God in countless languages. It's available for free on our smartphones. It is truly a remarkable book. Billy Graham once said The Bible has survived attacks of every kind. Neither barbaric vandalism nor civilized scholarship has touched it. Neither the burning of the fire, nor the laughter of skepticism has accomplished its annihilation. Through the many dark ages of man, its glorious promises have survived. Unchanged. As I was thinking about this passage today that comes from Exodus 14:14, in the few moments that I had to reflect upon it - it's the punctuation mark of a pretty remarkable moment in the Exodus story. And if you know this story, trust me, I think you'll be familiar with it, you'll know the real meat and inspiration behind this verse. In Chapter 14, the verse that was selected on this blue piece of paper is Exodus 14-14, says, The Lord will fight for you. And you have only to be silent. Would you join me for just a moment of prayer? Gracious God, I know that you have set everything before us. You have ordered the stars. You have brought order to chaos. You have brought us to this moment, Lord, with this amazing passage of Scripture, Lord. And I pray that as we dive in this together, may you speak to us. May your message be heard. Lord, I pray that every heart is open to what you would have say. Amen. As I looked at this passage, a question came to me that I just want to share with you right now. And it might be something that we pull through our conversation today. Have you ever been in a place where you just you arrive at a moment where you just maybe it's your prayer, maybe it's an exacerbation, saying I don't know what to do. This seems too complicated. This seems too hard. This seems too out of my zone. I don't know what to do. Have you ever had that thought? I know that I have. In fact, I have felt it routinely in this season of my life, as my family and I have seen a number of remarkable transformations and transitions. I have felt at times - I don't know what to do. But here's what God's does.. Through the amazing way that He knows and how He, is in His infinite presence and measure, He makes the way that we could never expect, never anticipate or see. And all we have to do is be silent, as the script says. So, in our in our passage here from Exodus 14, if you're not familiar, this is coming up in the Exodus story, and it's the crossing of the Red Sea. So in Exodus 14, what seems to be happening right now after generations of slavery, after being in captivity for hundreds of years, the Israelites are freed from Egypt. This is, of course, as you as you might know the story, after many types of plagues and other things that God did to persuade Pharaoh in the most 3 powerful way possible to let his people go. In Exodus 14, it says that God is moving and directing every step that the Israelites are taking as part of their leaving from Egypt. They're over here and then they move over here, and then they move over there. And as Pharaoh is watching their movements from perhaps scouts that are reporting back, the movements of these people, he realizes, at least from his point of view, that they look like they're lost. That they're walking around without direction. But the Word of God says they were following God's directions. At a moment where he

thought it was tactically advantageous when the Israelite people, many, many people who would take a long time to move from one place to the other. He notices that they've camped in a strategically disadvantaged place. And he decides that he is going to make his move to annihilate these people that have caused him so much heartache and trouble. So, he moves his entire army. And you can imagine what it would have been like for the Israelites at this moment in the story. They have just been freed after hundreds of years of slavery. They've been moving about, maybe even they are beginning to grumble about the directions that they're going. Maybe they have better ideas than Moses, this crazy guy. Maybe they have a better way of doing it. But whatever the case may be, they're stuck where they are. And advancing on them, is an army. You've got a large rushing river behind you or a sea behind you, And an army in front of you. Placed in that position, the Israelite people do what could be very predictable - they began to complain, and they appealed to Moses, saying we told you this would happen. We told you so. Look at us now! If you would have just left us alone in Egypt, in slavery, we wouldn't be here now. But here's what God said in response, amid all this complaining, all this chaos, and all this turmoil that was happening right in front of them. Here's what the Lord said in verse 13 - Don't be afraid. Stand firm and watch how I deliver you today. Isn't that remarkable? And then what follows, of course, is verse 14 The Lord will fight for you, and you only have to be silent. Now, I want to pause here for just a moment. I wonder sometimes, when I see something in the book of Exodus, how does that even inform the conversation in life that we live here today in 2022? Have you thought about that much? But I think this is a really easy one for us to attack together. Have you ever been in a position personally or corporately where you've felt like an invading army was pressing down on you? Maybe not an invading army. Maybe something so unexpected, so chaotic, that it has asked you the very question - what am I even doing here? I don't know what to do. Maybe it's a pretty significant medical complication. I don't know what to do. Maybe it's a conflict that you have with someone at work. I just don't know what to do. Maybe it's something that you've been praying for a really long time, and you're still waiting on God to answer you. I just don't know what to do. Maybe you look at the direction that our culture or our country or our church is going and you throw your hands up and you say, I just don't know what to do. Whatever it is, it might feel very similarly to how the Israelites were feeling. A pressure that presses closer and closer as the invading army comes and the body of water is trapping you in, you might begin to feel like many Israelite people did, thousands of years ago. Facing a tremendous challenge, these Israelites were looking at a place of total annihilation. Their history, their culture, their very future hung in the balance. And what does God say? He says, Do not be afraid. Stand firm and watch how I deliver you today. You do not have to fight. This is my fight. All you have to do is remain silent. A few years ago, I was a thousand miles away from a loved one who was in a dire medical condition. I mean, it was really, really bad. I can remember pacing around my kitchen in Mount Joy, Pennsylvania, thinking about this person who was many miles

away. I was talking to a doctor on the phone late at night, and they're explaining to me with this bizarre comfort and confidence of how they were going to use medical instruments that were probably smaller than my eye could see to help fix my loved one in surgery. It was remarkable to me. I got caught up in the moment thinking about how truly miraculous and amazing this option was. I kept listening. I didn't have very many questions, but there was this pause and I thought to myself, Man, I wonder what's next? And the doctor said, I need you to give me permission to do that. Me? Can I give you the names of other people to call? It felt overwhelming. But in that moment, I reached a point where I just didn't know what to do. I was so far away. I couldn't be there. I couldn't do what I thought was normal in this situation. And so I simply said, Whatever you think is best, let's do that. And for the next 12 hours. All I did was pace and pray. I didn't know what to do. Later I would find out that on a whim one of this person's closest friends would learn that they were in the hospital. And this friend called 20 people and they arrived at the hospital just a few hours later, and they prayed for the entire time in shifts. I learned that the surgery that we thought was first going to be happening right then and there, a couple of things changed in this person's medical condition, so they were able to delay it into the morning when the doctors and nurses could get some sleep and they would be fresh minded and ready for the day. They would be the first surgery that they would conduct that day. I then later learned that Going into the surgery that if this person had any more medical complications, that their survival rate would plummet almost to single digit percentage points. But, by the grace of God, that didn't happen. And what started as a 50/50 surgery Resulted a year later into 100% recovery. Amen. And I was a thousand miles away. I could do nothing but pray. Do not worry. Stand firm. And watch how the Lord will deliver you today. In this room There are many stories like mine who have seen God make a way when no one else sees a way. Here's the amazing thing about how God moves. Sometimes He creates a way that isn't always easy. He's going to show us the way through, and it's going to be dreadfully hard for us to do because He is always shaping us and forming us through the ways in which He moves us through this life. Those of us who believe in Jesus Christ, as our Lord and Savior, have faith that He is delivering us even in the most difficult of circumstances. Even at the lowest of lows and the greatest losses, He is always shaping us, forming us for the opportunity to serve him. Sometimes when God creates a way, it will require tremendous faith. He'll show us the way, and it'll look like something that we could never possibly do. It's going to require great faith. Sometimes when He creates a way it will show us the grace of God and the great way that He shapes us and forms us and molds us into the people that He's called us to be. Imagine 5 how life changing it would have been to see the sea split. Imagine that for just a moment. What it would have sounded like to hear the very breath of God rush through and split the Red Sea. Imagine further still that if you were one of those Israelite people to step on the ground and it was completely dry. Imagine then that you and all of your family members and everyone that you know and recognize as a member of your community would have walked through

that sea completely safe. And at the moment that the last person emerged from the sea, and as the army advanced, the water closed. And everything that you thought that represented danger or annihilation was immediately gone. Isn't that life changing? Isn't that amazing? I don't know what your relationship with the Bible is right now, but I hope that as we continue to move together as a community, that you'll familiarize yourself with something new about the Bible. Maybe you can commit to reading the Exodus story. Maybe you want to venture into looking into the books of poetry, like the books of Psalms. Maybe you want to commit to the very first time in your life reading all four of the gospel stories at the same time to really understand the different perspectives of those who walked alongside Jesus and interacted with him and talked to him. Our Bible is an inspirational word. It is the shot in the arm sometimes when we don't know where to go or what to do. It is the reminder that what we're facing is nothing new. That our God has delivered, and He will continue to deliver. Through our faith and through His grace. Would you join me for a word of prayer? Heavenly Father, we thank you for this great word. We thank you for the ways in which you have continued to work through us. We pray, Lord, that as we face into a new day, into a new way, that you will continue to mold us and shape us. That wherever we might be, whatever we might be facing into, It is your way that we will take. Oh, Lord, you are the way maker. Maybe find your way as you continue to work through us. These things you pray in your gracious name. Amen.