

New Life Episcopal Church
Uniontown, Ohio



Moses Parts the Red Sea

A Sermon for the 16th Sunday after Pentecost
September 13, 2026, 2026

Rev Barbara Bond

[Proper 19, Year A](#)

Exodus 14: 19-31

Water

Let's think about water, a great gift of natural elements. We had plenty of water this past week in the form of rain, nourishing for our gardens and landscapes, but we also know its destructive nature, in hurricanes, tsunamis, and floods. We have experienced the refreshment of a drink of cold water when we are parched and thirsty. We know what happens when water is scarce, such as our western states are experiencing.

Water. So basic, so simple, so elemental. Life came forth from water. We humans are still about 98 percent water in composition. I know I am built on water when tears escape my eyes.

In our baptism service we recall scriptural references to water. While I am pouring water into the baptismal font, I say, "We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life." Well, that is pretty succinct. We can't miss the importance of water in our sacred story.

This morning we are looking at one of those watery stories, the escape of the Jews from bondage in Egypt. We heard the stirring story in our Old Testament reading this morning. Perhaps you have seen it dramatized in the movie from the 1960s, "The Ten Commandments." Perhaps you have seen it illustrated in the animated film, "Prince of Egypt" from 1992. It is a story that never grows old. Our Jewish friends tell the story every year when they celebrate the Passover. We hear it every year at the Easter Vigil. It is a story of liberation, enacted with every baptism we perform. Moses lifts his staff, and God separates the waters of the sea, leaving a dry path through the middle of the sea bed for the Jews to cross over to freedom. It is a triumphal story.

It is perhaps easy to forget what the Egyptians experienced. But if you listened carefully this morning, you could imagine lots of dead Egyptians, drowned when the waters of the sea returned to their normal place. At what cost did the Jews escape? It cost a lot of Egyptian lives.

When I taught children's Sunday school and we told these stories, we were encouraged to gloss over the loss of life. When Noah hustled his family and a lot of animals into the ark, everyone else drowned, but we didn't mention that. And when we tell the story of the crossing of the Red Sea by the Jews, we try to ignore the cost in loss of life for the losers.

Our ritual of baptism does not ignore death by drowning. In fact, we reenact drowning each time we perform a baptism. Baptism is really about drowning, dying to our old way of life, and arising as fresh new Christians. The symbolism is very strong. And the quantity of water is not important. A few drops sprinkled on the candidate's head is sufficient. But those wishing for a fuller, shall we say deeper? experience may wish to be fully submerged. But it is all the same: we are washed clean by the waters of baptism. In the service, when I continue blessing the water of baptism, I make this explicit: I say, "We thank you, Father, for the water of baptism. **In it** we are buried with Christ in his death. **By it** we share in his resurrection. **Through it** we are reborn by the Holy Spirit."

Searching for meaning in catastrophe is not a quick task. Efforts to understand the terrorist attack of 2001 will take longer than 25 years. We still struggle with the Holocaust and the bombing of Hiroshima from 80 years ago. Efforts to celebrate our nation's 250th anniversary were carefully sanitized. No wonder we have no definitive singular meaning about the Jews escape from Egypt, roughly 3200 years ago. Christians and Jews have embraced meaningful interpretations that bring us joy, but we do well to remember the other side of triumph. It keeps us honest.