

Sermon Transcript
6/14/20 – Pastor Dan Hollis
Exodus 19:3-8a

Right off the bat I want to inform you that this sermon is going to contain information about the end of the 1997 film “Titanic,” so if you haven't seen Titanic yet and somehow you've made it this far without knowing how that film ends and spoilers are important to you and you don't want to have the ending ruined for you, then right now might be a good time to pause the sermon and then go spend the three hundred hours and two VHS tapes that it takes to get you through Titanic, and then come back, but I do promise that if you haven't seen Titanic you don't actually need to have seen it in order to get where I'm going with this—at least I hope so.

Everybody back? Great. So at the end of Titanic, the ship is sinking and we find Jack and Rose, our heroes, floating in the icy water. Now they've managed to wrest this great big door that Rose is safely on top of right now, but Jack is clinging to the side of the door in the frigid water and his endurance is flagging: his body is starting to give out. The door has gotten them this far, but unless something changes Jack's human strength is going to give out. Now for anyone who has spent some time with this scene, maybe paused it or rewound it a couple of times, it's pretty clear to a lot of folks that that door was actually big enough to hold both Jack and Rose, but for whatever reason either they were too cold and tired and to notice that it could hold both, or maybe Jack didn't want to risk accidentally knocking Rose off when he tried to get on. It could've been either of those reasons; maybe there were plenty of others, but what we can tell as viewers is that it would have fit both of them if they had taken the risk to try and make it work.

The reason that I'm talking about the ending of Titanic in our sermon today is because it's one of the first things I thought of when I read through our Scripture for today. In our Scripture passage we find the people of Israel, the Israelites, these ancient people who were escaping from Egypt. Now in order to get out of Egypt, this terrible situation their people found themselves in, there had to be a lot of trust along the way. First of all Moses, who would be their leader, had to trust that God would be able to work through him—and

Moses had a lot of really compelling reasons that he wouldn't make a good leader for these people, that he couldn't do what needed to be done. But God told him, if you put your faith in me then together we will free these people. And once that had been done and the people of Israel had made their way, or at least started to make their way out of Egypt, then they had to trust—because they all knew that on the way they were going there was just a big sea. And they didn't have any boats—they didn't even have a Titanic to try and get them across the sea. And yet they trusted, because God said, if you put one foot in front of the other and you make your way to the sea I will get you across to the Promised Land. They had every reason not to believe it, but they put their trust, they put their faith, they put their effort into this journey. And sure enough, the miracle took place and they were all able to make it across and the Egyptians weren't. And then came the next step, because then they found themselves in a great wilderness on their way to a Promised Land that none of them had ever seen. For generations none of them had left Egypt. Moses hadn't seen it, and he was the one leading this caravan. But God said, stick with me. Follow my commandments, commit to my work and we will get through this together to the Promised Land. And this idea of the Israelites following these commandments that God created for them, it's really a partnership between the Israelites and God. That's what these commandments were. They served as a contract between the people of Israel and God, saying, this is how we will relate to each other and this is how we will do good in this world.

Now I venture to say that very few of the people who are listening to the sermon right now are Israelites; I certainly am not one. And so our story as Christians is a little bit different than the story of the Israelites to be sure. But we as Christians see the Israelites as our spiritual ancestors—that their story has let us to ours. We have this kinship, we have this connection to them, and through them to God. And so the question for us becomes, what does our contract look like between us and God? What does this partnership that God asks of all God's people look like for us. What is the work that God wants us to do? That God can join us in? And so I want to bring this back to Jack and Rose out there in the water. Because what we find God saying to the Israelites in our Scripture reading for today is basically, I have gotten you this far. Put your

faith in me, work with me, and we shall see ourselves together to the Promised Land.

Now, when God says these things, God says: I have borne you out of Egypt, I have borne you on eagles' wings to freedom. It really does feel like... God's got you this far kid. Hang on tight. We're gonna get there. We're gonna get there together. God isn't saying, keep the faith and I will snap my fingers and you will find yourself in the Promised Land. God never hid that they were going to be going through a difficult journey. It was going to take them years to get to the Promised Land, and it was going to take years of hard work. But they would get there, and God would help them do it. And Jack and Rose in the water... this door that they have found has gotten them this far. But Jack right now in the water, all he's trusting in is his own human strength. He's clinging to this door with all of his muscles even as his hands going numb and the cold gets into his muscles and the cold gets into his mind. Weariness sets in. Until he can hold on no longer... and lets go.

Whereas I think if that door could talk, if that door could speak with the voice of God, I think that door would tell Jack: I've gotten you this far. Trust me; don't just trust yourself, trust me. I can hold you both, I'm big enough, take a look! Climb on board and together we will make it to rescue.

And either Jack couldn't or wouldn't make that leap of faith to trust that door to hold them both, and to use his muscles or what was left of them to climb onto that door. Instead it was so much easier for him to just let go.

We find ourselves in that same place so much in our lives, don't we? I mean right now we are in the middle of a global pandemic that is sapping the will to go on from so many. It is wearying. It is exhausting. It would be so much easier to just to give up. You're halfway to the grocery store, you realize you've forgotten your mask at home, and it's so much easier to just... I'm just gonna sneak in, sneak out, get what I need and go because... it's fine. I'll be fine, everyone else will be fine, it's not a big deal.

I would venture to say that it is a big deal, and that it is worth turning back to get that mask.

It would be so much easier to go and just hug your grandkids. It would be so much easier to get together with a group of friends and just forget the world for a while. It would be so much easier... to just let go.

And then I think of all of the people who not just now but for their entire lives and for generations have been struggling... against inequality and injustice and racism and abuses of power. These people who are fighting an incredible battle not just now with the protests that are happening across this country and across the world, but for their entire lives in big and small ways. I've never been a person of color, but I can imagine that it must be so tempting... to give up. To let go. To roll over. To sink.

That can be an attractive thing because our human strength can only carry us so far, and just like the Israelites it is often impossible to even imagine let alone and see what the promised land on the other side might look like. And so I tell you now, all of you who are weary, all of you who are weakening—because I know I have been... God has gotten you this far. Put your faith in God, and that's not a trite saying, that's active thing. The Israelites had to put one foot in front of the other, they had to figure out how to survive in the wilderness, in the desert, they had to cross that sea without a boat. They had to really put their faith in God. Forge that relationship with God, that active relationship, that partnership... so that the God who has been there for you this far can continue to be there for you.

You cannot do this alone... and, you know, it may sound weird coming from a pastor, but you can't do this with God alone. It takes God... and it takes you... to clench your teeth, climb onto that door, hang on for dear life... and never let go. Amen.