

CONCORDIA SEMINARY  
**LENTEN SERMON SERIES**



**THE BOOK OF EXODUS  
LET MY PEOPLE GO!**

R. REED LESSING

**SAMPLE**

# The Book of Exodus: Let My People Go!

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday and so does our emphasis on Moses's book called Exodus. In it, Moses asks Pharaoh to let God's people go seven times (Ex 5:1; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3) and Pharaoh finally does it! When he does, God's salvation is so amazing that the event becomes the Gospel of the Old Testament. Israel's Scriptures mention the exodus 125 times!

Throughout the book of Exodus God reveals who he is through his absence and his presence, through his silence and his speech, through his wrath and his mercy, and through his judgment and his amazing grace. In doing so, the book paints a beautiful portrait of Jesus.

The Sunday Morning Bible Class (see Bible Study starting on page 60) will look at the exciting history and theology connected with the book of Exodus. It will all be very practical and useful!

A Lenten devotional booklet based on Exodus is available from Creative Communications for the Parish for \$12 to cover the copyright fee. Those who would like to use the booklet should call Creative Communications (800-325-9414) to request a copyright release (Order Code RL4). Creative Communications will send a PDF of the booklet along with a copyright release statement, indicating permission to print copies for their congregation.

Sermon plans are as follows:

**Ash Wednesday** "Big Things with Small Stuff" (Ex 2:1–10)

**Lent One** "How God Changes Us" (Ex 3:1–14)

**Lent Two** "Stop Trying and Start Trusting" (Ex 14:1–29)

**Lent Three** "Strike the Rock!" (Ex 17:1–7)

**Lent Four** "Mine!" (Ex 20:1–17)

**Lent Five** "Digging Ourselves into a Hole" (Ex 32:1–14)

**Palm Sunday** "A New Beginning!" (Ex 34:1–8)

**Maundy Thursday** "Access!" (Ex 24:1–11)

**Good Friday** "Agnus Dei" (Ex 12:1–13)

**Easter** "Against all Odds!" (Ex 15:1–18)

**SAMPLE**

# Ash Wednesday

## Order of Worship

### Theme of the Day

God does big things with small stuff! He does it for Israel through **Moses** and he does it for us through **Jesus**.

### Invocation and Call to Worship (Based on Job 19:23–27)

[During the sermon series on Exodus our worship will use psalms that celebrate Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. Today we use selected verses from Psalm 66.]

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**C: Amen.**

P: Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you.”

**C: Come and see what God has done, how awesome are his works for us!**

P: For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver.

**C: You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs.**

P: You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and water.

**C: But God has listened and heard our prayer.**

P: He turned the sea into dry land; we passed through the waters on foot.

**All: He has brought us to a place of abundance!**

### Processional Hymn

Lift High the Cross (stanzas 1–4)

*LSB 837*

### Confession and Absolution

P: Hear me, merciful and mighty Father, as I confess my bondage to sin and death.

**C: I know that nothing good lives in me.**

P: That is, in my sinful nature.

**C: I have the desire to do good.**

P: But I cannot carry it out.

**C: What I do is not the good I want to do.**

P: No, the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing.

**C: I find this law at work—**

P: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

**C: In my inner being, I delight in your law.**

P: But I see another law at work in the members of my body,  
waging war and making me a prisoner of the law of sin and death.

**All: Who will rescue me from this body of death?**

[You are invited to silently reflect on the fact that though our sin is great, Christ’s love is greater.]

P: Hear the good news! The same God who delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage also delivers you from your body of sin and death! Jesus Christ, the Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed and his blood forgives you and sets you free! He turned the sea into dry land; we passed through the waters on foot.

**All: He has brought us to a place of abundance!**

### Hymn

Lift High the Cross (stanzas 5–6)

LSB 837

### Prayer of the Day

P: The Lord be with you,

**C: And also with you.**

P: Let us pray. Almighty and everlasting God, you despise nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and contrite hearts that, lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, we may receive from you full pardon and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C: Amen.**

### Scripture Readings

Theme: God's doing things with small stuff

OT: Exodus 2:1–10

EP: 2 Corinthians 5:16–21

GO: Matthew 6:1–4, 16–18

**Creed** (Luther's Explanation of the 2nd Article)

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### Sermon

The First Part in the Series

Exodus: Let My People Go!

**“Big Things with Small Stuff”**

(Ex 1:1–2:10)

Howard Rutledge was an American fighter pilot. He was shot down and captured by the North Vietnamese in 1965. The North Vietnamese threw him into a prison in Hanoi, North Vietnam. What was the prison called? *Heartbreak Hotel.*

Howard Rutledge writes, “When the door slammed shut a feeling of utter loneliness swept over me. I was locked in a six by six cell. It’s hard to describe what solitary confinement can do to defeat a person. There are no books, no magazines and no newspapers. The only colors you see are drab gray and dirt brown. You’re locked in your filthy cell, trying to keep your sanity.”

We all know what it feels like to be locked up in Heartbreak Hotel. The problem for us, though, is that at first it didn't look like Heartbreak Hotel. It looked like the Promised Land! It even was the Promised Land—at least for a while. That moral indiscretion? “No big deal!” That financial dishonesty? “No big deal!” That small, little lie? “No big deal!”

Sooner or later, though, “no big deal” becomes a really big deal! What we thought was the Promised Land becomes the death of a job, the death of a marriage, the death of our hope, the death of our joy. Satan slams the door shut and says, “Welcome to Heartbreak Hotel! You can check out anytime you like. But you will never leave!”

Today we begin a new sermon series on Moses's book called Exodus. I'm calling this series, “Let my people go!” God sees his people Israel in the Egyptian Heartbreak Hotel and tells Pharaoh—seven times—“Let my people go!”

You remember the story. Because of a famine in 1,847 BC Jacob and his family (seventy people in all) traveled from Canaan to Egypt. That's Exodus 1:1–7.

Fast forward 300 years and we come to Exodus 1:8: “Then a new king, who did not know Joseph, came to power in Egypt.” This king, or Pharaoh, saw that Israelites were becoming too numerous and too powerful. So what did the Pharaoh do? He created his own version of Heartbreak Hotel!

**Stage One: State Slavery.** Exodus 1:11 says: “So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh.” Every Israelite slave was required to produce 3,000 bricks a day—*3,000 bricks a day!* And you think you have a tough job! Try this. Get water from a canal. Pour the water into a mud pit. Step up and down in the mud pit. Add straw to some mud. Let it dry in the sun. And presto! You've got a brick! Now make 3,000 of those a day—every day—with no time off. Ever!

**Stage Two: Private Infanticide.** Exodus 1:15–16 describes it this way. “The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, ‘When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.’” God sees two women—Shiphrah and Puah—who obey him and disobey the Pharaoh's command, and so God puts their names in the Bible. But this Pharaoh, the most powerful man on the earth, his name isn't in the Bible! Why is that? *God does big things with small stuff!*

**Stage Three: Open Genocide.** Exodus 1:22 describes Pharaoh's decree. “Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.” It's against this backdrop of Pharaoh's Heartbreak Hotel that Moses is born.

“Now a man of the house of Levi [Amram] married a Levite woman [Jochebed], and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son” (Ex 2:1–2). This son is Moses. Moses is the couple's third child. There is an older sister, whose name is Miriam, and an older brother, whose name is Aaron.

“When she [Jochebed] saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch” (Ex 2:2–3). This word, translated “basket,” is the same word that is translated “ark”—as in Noah's Ark—in Genesis. This ark in Exodus, just like

Noah's in Genesis, is coated with tar and pitch. But you say, "Noah's ark was so much bigger!" Why is that? Because in the book of Exodus *God does big things with small stuff!*

This baby boy is placed in the Nile River and Miriam runs along the river's edge. She watches as Pharaoh's daughter bathes with her servants in the Nile River.

"She [Pharaoh's daughter's servant] opened it and saw the baby. He was crying and she felt sorry for him" (Ex 2:6). Moses is crying. This changes everything! In the book of Exodus a baby's cry changes everything? Of course! *God does big things with small stuff!*

"When the child grew older, she [Jochebed] took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, 'I brought him out of the water'" (Ex 2:10). *Moses!* Moses is an Egyptian word that means "bring out of water!" Finally! Someone who will bring Israel out of Pharaoh's Heartbreak Hotel! And Moses will do that through what? Water! Moses will part the water of the Red Sea with a wooden staff. A wooden staff? *God does big things with small stuff!*

God sees us in our prison, our self-made Heartbreak Hotel. God sees us trying to get out. He sees us putting on our Superman or Superwoman cape, thinking that we are superheroes who can save ourselves.

I've got really bad news for you. You are not a super hero. And neither am I. We can't fight our way out of our prison of sin. We can't think our way out, buy our way out, educate our way out, vacation our way out, or blast our way out. We're all stuck in sin—Heartbreak Hotel!

I've got some really, really good news for you! *God does big things with small stuff!* Jesus brings us out of our prison of sin and death. And, just like the book of Exodus, Jesus does it all with small stuff.

The tokens of Christ's Passion. Chalice, torch, lantern, sword, whip, whipping post, clothing, 30 pieces of silver, dice, spear, hand which struck Christ, torch, pitcher of gall and vinegar. Jesus doesn't recoil, run, or retreat at the sight of our ugly prison. Jesus comes to us right where we are. To do what? Really big things (set us free), with really small stuff.

Howard Rutledge has more to say about Heartbreak Hotel. He writes, "I prayed for strength to make it through the ongoing night. Then, one day, a glimmer of light dawned through the bottom of my prison door. I knew that God would set me free. And he did!"

Life gets dark. Sometimes life gets really dark. What we thought was the Promised Land is really Heartbreak Hotel. "You can check out anytime you like. But you will never leave!"

But there is a glimmer of light dawning. Can you see it? It's Easter light. It's Easter deliverance! And it is here, for us, right now! How can we be so sure? **God still does really big things—set us free—with really small stuff!** In the name of Jesus, that's God gift to you. Amen.

**Hymn**

What Wondrous Love Is This

*LSB 543*

**Prayers of the Church**

Following the pastor's prayer, "If the Son sets us free," the congregation is invited to respond, "**We are free, indeed.**" This is based upon John 8:36.

**Benediction**

P: God has listened and heard our prayer!

**C: He turned the sea into dry land; we passed through the waters on foot.**

P: May the Almighty God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—lead you to a place of abundance.

**All: Amen and Amen!**

**Recessional Hymn**

On My Heart Imprint Your Image

*LSB 422*

**Silent Prayer**

Lord Jesus, I believe that you will bring me out of my prison, because you delight in doing big things with small stuff! Amen.