

Exodus 14: 19-31

(Lectionary Year A, Proper 19)

By Beth Barnett

Creative collaborative reading of the Bible passage	
You will need:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Printout of Exodus 14 Image by Chris Booth.• Print outs or screen display of the text with the following words highlighted in various colours as shown below. Rainmakers/rice shakers/sfx app on personal devices.• Optional: Flame torches, matches, tapers, candle. Red material.• Whiteboard/flipchart & markers
Time required:	5-6 minutes

Introduction

Today we pick up the story of the Hebrew slaves, that we have been following in the book of Exodus in the Old Testament of the Bible. The Hebrew slaves are sometimes called the People of Israel or Israelites or just Israel or Jacob. After this chapter - where they are finally free, they are never called Hebrews again in the book of Exodus.

God has heard their cries of suffering being oppressed as slaves.

With the complicated character of Moses as their leader - confronting Pharaoh with messages from God to free the people - and with the country of Egypt in chaos following a series of plagues and natural disasters, the Hebrew slaves have escaped into the wilderness.

But the sea is in front of them, and Pharaoh's army are pursuing close behind!



We are going to read this episode in the story a few times, paying attention to different things.

Reading ONE

In our first reading we are going to take the parts of the two groups - the Hebrew slaves, who are now being called the **Israelites** or '**Israel**' who are marked **pink** in the text, and the Egyptians who are marked **orange**.

Divide your group in half, designating the front half of the group 'Israelites' - calling out "Israelites!" when they appear in the text, and the back half of the group the Egyptians - calling out "Egyptians" when they appear in the text.

Practice calling out these identities a couple of times. Warn each group that sometimes they are called 'Israel' and 'Egypt' for short, and not to miss out speaking up then too.

Read the passage through, slowly and expressively - making full use of the dramatic tension in the story - pausing on the words Israelites and Egyptians (and their variations) for the groups to join in their shouting.

Did you notice that it sounds in the story like it's heating up for a battle?

It sounds like there are two armies? The Egyptian army and the Israelite army?

Let's look at the text again, using Chris Booth's Art Image of this text to help us think about the 'battle' between these two armies.

Display Art image on screen or as a large poster.

If the Egyptians are an army, what kind of weapons do you think they have?

Give space for people to make suggestions, to notice the chariots and horses, to recognize the military force of the Egyptians.

The Egyptians are a seriously well equipped army. They are looking dangerous. But what about the Israelites? What weapons do they have?

Give space for suggestions - accept and affirm all contributions. Help the group think through the likelihood that the Israelites are unarmed. They are carrying children, bowls of dough, and driving herds of animals. Refer to the Art to prompt recognition of the vulnerability of the Israelites, and identify the large walls of water as their "weapon".

The Israelites had no weapons, no swords or bows and arrows or spears or chariots. But the Egyptians were overcome by the sea; the water was the weapon that defeated the Egyptians.

Reading TWO

Let's read again and pay attention to the water in the text - those words have been marked in green - and let's all join in with those words and add some watery-waves sound effects at the same time.

Distribute the rainmakers and rice shakers to volunteers and/or invite people with devices to find a water/waves/ocean sound effect and be cued ready. Have a couple of practices of starting and finishing the water sounds with the words, then read the text together again, slowly and expressively - making full use of the dramatic tension in the story - pausing on the words in green.

Reading THREE

So we've noticed that there are two "armies" named, but one of the armies isn't really an army, but a group of weaponless asylum seeking once-were-slaves - men and women, children and the aged - fleeing, running away to find freedom. What's going on calling them an army? Imagine such vulnerable suffering people being seen as an army to be attacked? I wonder if in our world today sometimes vulnerable suffering people are treated like they are a threatening army to be attacked with violence instead of cared for with compassion?"

In our second time reading we noticed that their only weapon was no weapon at all! Although the text calls them an army, they are a non-fighting weaponless army. What defeats the Egyptians is their own desire for violence.

Of course there is another factor in this story apart from the Egyptians with their chariots and horses, and the unarmed Israelites.

The presence of God.

In our third time reading we are going to pay particular attention to God, how God is present and known, and where God is.

Divide your gathering into two groups, those who drove to your gathering today,



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reading the words in **red** (naming God), and those who took public transport/were passengers/walked/biked, reading the words in **blue** (describing where God is). Read the passage through, slowly and expressively - making full use of the dramatic tension in the story - pausing on the words in blue and red, for each group to join in.

** For additional creative visual and kinesthetic impact;*

- invite a small team to light a quick burning torch on each on each word in red.

**For a lower risk/effort option, give a small team a few long pieces of red/orange lightweight fabric to 'flare' up over their heads in each word in red.*

- invite a small team to chart on a whiteboard/flipchart/butcher's paper the movements of the presence of God (See sketch below)

Conclusion

We have read this story three different ways today. It's a story that has been told over and over and over again through the Bible in lots of different forms - in songs and prayers and poems and political rants and motivational speeches and laments.

I wonder which way of reading interested or impacted you the most?

Where has the fire of God's presence flared up and caught your attention today?

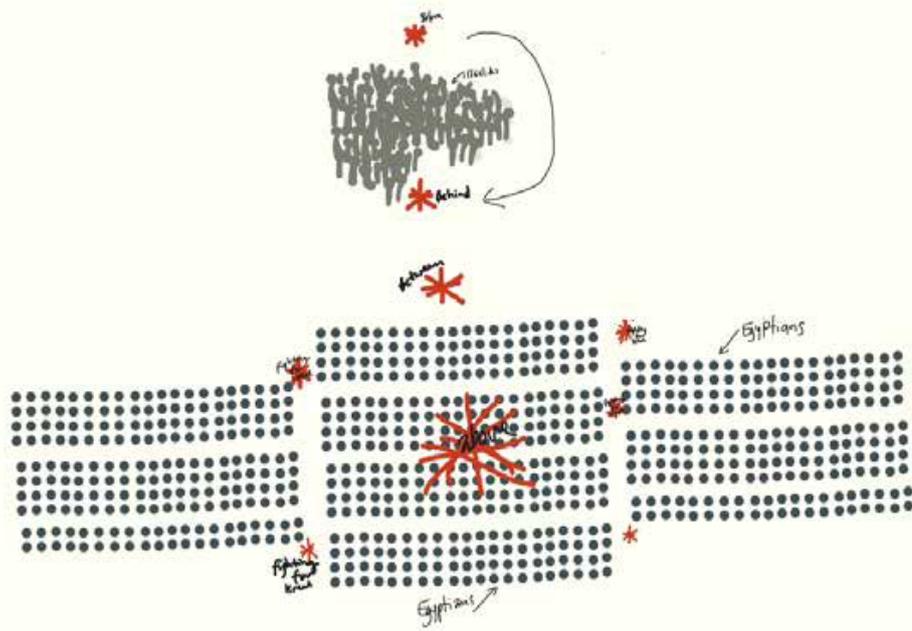
Who has come to mind - friends or family or community or strangers or places in the wider world - as you've read this story today?

Ask those around you in small groups for their response to one of these questions.



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Exodus 14:19-31

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them;

and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided.

The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers.

At the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic.

He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt."

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers."

So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea.

The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained.

But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.

Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.



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