

God Knows! Weller UMC Sermon, Sunday Sept 13, 2020

A sermon by Pastor Taysie Phillips

Good morning! I am hoping to bring you a message of hope and encouragement today. So many of us are struggling under what I've heard called "surge protector overload." You know what a surge protector is, and how it protects our devices from electric surges. Well, people have a kind of electrical surge that happens when we are dealing with an emergency. You might have heard stories, as I have of things like a Mom suddenly developing superhuman strength and lifting a car off a trapped son? We all have energy surges when facing major problems. But right now, there is one major problem after another, after another, after another. The entire West Coast seems to be on fire, hurricanes threaten the Gulf Coast frequently, and we have scary protests and looting in our cities. And over it all, is the constant seemingly unending and unrelenting threat of the Coronavirus striking us, or someone we love. Not to mention all the huge unremitting merciless and raucous pounding of politics, politics, politics, everywhere. *Let us pray:*

*So! Lord, may I bring a word of hope to your people today. Lord Jesus, our friend and protector, please use me to bring encouragement to your beloved listening. Use me, O Lord, use me! Use my words, not to tickle ears, but to go down those ears into their hearts. To reassure people, to bring cheer to folks, and most of all to glorify your name. For it is in You, O Lord, that we find grace, peace... and salvation. Hallelujah!*

Let me start now by telling you a story about my Dad. My Papa loved music and to sing! In his youth, he had the great privilege of going to a prep school in Pittsburgh, and he joined the glee club there. Some of you might remember that that is what they called a singing group back then? So one of my favorite stories about my dad is how, when the glee club once - this was probably 1936 or so - drove from their school in Pittsburgh to Richmond - to sing in a competition there. My Dad brought along his victrola—one of those hand cranked victrolas. He carried it on his lap so they could all - I envision 6 young men packed into the car - listening to music as they went. He wrote about it in a letter to his mom back home in New Orleans.

That was my Dad. Many of the old tunes that he would sing or hum still bounce around in my head from time to time. One in particular that comes up occasionally is: "Nobody knows the troubles I've seen... Nobody knows my sorrow... Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down... Sometimes I'm almost to the ground... oh, nobody knows." I wish my Dad were here to sing it in his rich baritone!

And I hope you know the tune, because you sure don't want me to sing it out loud! Not one of the talents I inherited from my Dad.

But don't we all just feel that way sometimes? And then we Christians remember: God knows. God knows our troubles. God knows our sorrows. God knows them all. And God knows all about us.

And couldn't the Israelites have sung this song in the situation they found themselves in? They must have felt lost and alone, far from home and familiar comforts, just disquieted on every side, scared. On surge protector overload for sure!

They were undoubtedly tattered, decrepit, and bedraggled after being in slavery under the Egyptians all their life. Many had likely been maimed by the heavy work they did. Scripture tells us (Exodus 1:13,14) that the Egyptians worked the Israelite men "ruthlessly" to the point where their lives were bitter and miserable, and that their spirits were broken. They were dejected, down almost to the ground, as the song goes. The women were also forbidden to raise male children and expected to kill any that were born. Then God called Moses, and Moses persuaded Pharaoh, by a series of miracles, to let them go out of that onerous country, that difficult life. This is certainly a rich story that is deeply embedded in our societal lore and strikes a chord within each of us. It is actually a universal story of freedom from slavery, all kinds of slavery.

After all those miracles done by God's anointed man, Moses, - the last miracle of which is the Angel of Death passing over the blood of a perfect spotless lamb put on their doorways, you remember - the people were finally away from Egypt. But mindsets don't change that quickly, and they still thought of themselves as slaves.

So, there they were, tramping through the desert, many of them probably without sandals or anything other than rags to wear. The Egyptians had given them their jewelry, but jewelry does not help much in a desert wilderness. They were following Moses, whom they knew had performed all those miracles. But they were scared, worn down, weak. Understand, too, that they did not go straight from Egypt north along the Mediterranean shore, which was the short way to their destination. The Bible tells us that that quicker route

went through enemy territory, Philistine country, and God knew his people's fragile state of mind and didn't want them to get discouraged by a war.

It always amazes me that Moses had them following a pillar of fire by night, a cloud by day—I can't imagine following someone who says "see that cloud over there? We will just follow that cloud" (well, truth be told, I've seen some men rather follow a cloud then stop for directions, but that's another sermon). But maybe it was a great big towering cloud of bright white? The Bible doesn't really say. What we do know is that this patchwork of motley folks followed Moses who was following this cloud.

They then found themselves in an untenable situation, where they couldn't go back, as they had the wilderness behind them. They couldn't turn to either side, as they had enemies on every side. And then! And then! They saw that Pharaoh had used this time when they were wandering around in the wilderness to gather his army, the whole Egyptian army – some six hundred chariots with officers all over them and come up behind them. They knew it was big strong healthy guys on horseback and riding in chariots, certainly armed with shields and swords, and dangerous. And in front of them this big body of water.

It's very interesting to me to note what the Bible says that God did then: God shifted his position from in front of the people to behind them. He got between the Israelites and the Egyptians. I just love that! And behold, God was a light to his people but darkness to their enemy. God both protected his people and confused their enemies. Our amazing God!

You ever make a mistake? You ever find yourself in such a bind with nowhere to go? You can't turn right, you can't turn left, the enemy behind you, wilderness and enemies on either side, an impenetrable barrier in front of you?

That's the place where my heart tends to get dejected and starts to sing mournfully, "nobody knows the troubles I've seen - nobody knows my sorrow." Only too often my 'surge protector' gets overloaded.

Listen: remember and remind yourselves at these times: God knows.

And know that God's got your back. God's not only before you, going in the front of you to lead you and guide you and to pave the way for you, but God's also beside you, on your right hand and on your left hand. Yes, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ within me. Christ behind you, making up the difference for where you slack, where you lack, where you are weak; and fighting your battles for you.

We know the rest of the story - Moses raised his staff, the waters parted, the Israelite people crossed over on dry ground. Then, when the Egyptians and their fancy chariots were on that dry ground in the middle of the sea, with water piled up on either side, Moses stretched out his hand again, and the waters came crashing down. All the Egyptians and their powerful war machines and people were no match for God.

Let me make one more point here. Yes, God knows you. God knows your problems, your issues, your fears and concerns. God knows and has a planned way out for you—perhaps through the wilderness, perhaps across an uncrossable sea... God's got it covered.

But let us not forget that God also knew the Egyptians. And loved them just as much as he loved the Israelites. He knew where each charioteer lived, what each soldier's family looked like. Many of them were really just as much slaves as the Israelites—what choice did they have but to follow their leader, their Pharaoh? The Bible tells us that God took no pleasure in their death. Listen to Proverbs 24:17: Do not rejoice when your enemies fall, and do not let your heart be glad when they stumble. I just don't think God is ever pleased by anyone's misfortune.

I don't know what battles you face this day, but God knows! God knows you and your battles just as much as he knew the Israelites and all their battles. And please, whatever battles you are fighting-- be it financial battles, health problems, battles with fear, worry, depression—whatever your battle, know in your heart that God knows. Get that fixed firmly in your heart. It is *not* that nobody knows—God knows. And remember also that, whatever humans might be on the other side of your battles, God knows and loves them just as much as God loves you. God knows!!!

*Let us pray:*

*Lord, I thank you for this day! I thank you that you preached this sermon to my heart before any words ever left my mouth. And, yes, dear Lord, please may these words bring peace and freedom to all hearts listening! Amen.*