



“One Foot in Front of the Other”

Exodus 14:10-21

September 13, 2026

Rev. Amy Miracle

Broad Street Presbyterian Church

Columbus, Ohio

The story of the crossing of the red sea is an exciting story. It’s a thrilling story. But it isn’t a very accessible one. It’s not like we can say:

Oh, this story reminds me of the time when an army of chariots pursued me.

or

Just yesterday I was stuck in traffic and someone who looked a lot like Moses parted the traffic for me.

The first fourteen chapters of the Book of Exodus are all about the confrontation between Pharaoh and Moses. Standing behind Pharaoh is all the power of the empire. Standing behind Moses is God. The two go head-to-head, toe-to-toe. The battle is epic and memorable.

Stuck in the middle of all this are the Israelites. They know Pharaoh – they are familiar with his ruthlessness –and they are terrified of him. But the situation they find themselves in doesn’t seem much better than what they experienced as slaves. There is no food or water. They don’t know where they are headed. The way forward is blocked by a huge body of water. They are unsure of whether they can trust this God who is still relatively unknown to them. They find themselves caught between a rock and a hard place.

I don’t think we need to travel far to find people in our time and place dealing with such circumstances. I think we need only journey on I-70 for about 45 minutes to the town of Springfield. Spend some time with our Haitian neighbors. They came to the U.S. because life in their home country is untenable. The economy is in ruins and violence and kidnapping are rampant. They came to this country legally to work and raise their children and over 10,000 such folks found a home in Springfield.

All of that changed when the provision that allowed them to live and work in this country was ended by the current administration. Since then, Haitians in Springfield have lived in uncertainty and fear. Some have been detained, including two pastors. Some have been fitted with ankle monitors. Many have lost their jobs. Many are afraid to leave their houses.

One young man, co-captain of his high school soccer team, a member of the National Honor Society, walked into traffic on I-70 and died, soon after being fitted with an ankle monitor.

I want us to keep their story in mind as we explore this passage.

Back to the Israelites. They can't return to their slave camps. The Egyptians would capture them and kill them. They can't move forward because the water will surely crush them.

At that moment, God says to Moses, "Tell the Israelites to go forward." Easy for you to say God. So hard for the Israelites to do – so hard to follow this God with only God's promise that they will make it safely to the other side. God invites them to take a step. And then another.

And the truth is that I don't know if that is an option for our Haitian neighbors. I don't know what that looks like.

I have another story I want to throw into the mix.

In 1915, Ernest Shackleton and his crew were attempting to cross Antarctica when their ship, the *Endurance*, became trapped in sea ice. For months, they waited. Eventually the pressure of the ice began crushing the ship. The crew abandoned it, unloaded what they could onto the ice, and watched as the *Endurance* sank.

Twenty-eight men were stranded on drifting Antarctic ice. No radio. No rescue coming. No obvious way home. There was no plan that could get them from that situation all the way back to safety.

So, Shackleton stopped thinking that way. He just tackled the next thing. The goal became: get to solid ground. They hauled supplies and lifeboats across the ice. When the ice finally broke apart, they got into the lifeboats and eventually reached a place called Elephant Island. For the first time in nearly five hundred days, they were standing on solid ground.

But Elephant Island was remote and uninhabited. Nobody knew they were there. So, the next goal became: go find help.

Shackleton and five others climbed into a 22-foot lifeboat and set out across roughly eight hundred miles of some of the most dangerous ocean in the world, aiming for the tiny island of South Georgia. There was a whaling station there where they could get help.

They made it.

Except they landed on the wrong side of the island. So now the goal became: cross the mountains. Shackleton and two others walked across an unmapped, mountainous interior until they finally reached the whaling station on the other side. And then the goal became: go back for everyone else. After several failed rescue attempts, Shackleton finally returned to Elephant Island in August 1916, nearly two years after they began the expedition. Every man was still alive.

It's an amazing story. That could have gone differently. And I share it not to say that oh everything is going to turn out just fine for Haitians in this country. I share it because it reminds us that when things are at their most challenging the only thing we can do is take the next step. Like the Israelites did.

Which step is the hardest? Sometimes it's the first one. Maybe you've had this experience – that dawning realization that you aren't doing well, that you need help managing grief or alcohol or food or anxiety– that you need help and you need it sooner rather than later. That first step is so hard to take: calling a trusted friend, reaching out to one of your pastors. leaving a voicemail for a therapist. The way forward is not clear, but you take a first step. And then another one.

Another thing we can glean from the Shackleton story. If you leave someone behind, go back and get them! Don't leave people behind. If our Haitian neighbors are struggling, how can we support them in taking the next step?

Some ideas. You will no doubt have better ones.

- Give some money to COMPASS, the church's program to prevent homelessness. In recent weeks, COMPASS has helped 4 Haitian families here in Columbus stay housed. No doubt, they will help more in the future.
- Another idea. Walk with me and COMPASS Director Mary Mutegi on October 3 in the fundraiser for CRIS. CRIS, Community Refugee and Immigration Services is a long-term partner of ours. Participating in their run/walk is a great way to raise money and awareness of the needs of refugees and immigrants here in Central Ohio. Details are in your bulletin.
- Third idea: Talk to people about what is happening to our Haitian neighbors. Share their story. With your family and friends. With the people in your life. Tell the story of what is happening.

I want to return one last time to that moment when the people stand on the banks of the red sea.

The people are afraid. We know that because in verse thirteen, God speaks through Moses, It's the word that we most need to hear. Many days. Most days. "Do not be afraid."

It's the word that God says to Abraham and Sarah. It is the word that Moses hears through the burning bush. It's the word that the angels share with Mary, with Joseph, with the shepherds on the hillside.

It is the word spoken to the women at the empty tomb. "Do not be afraid."

It is a word God speaks again and again. It is a hopeful word for the newly unemployed. It is a comforting word for the one facing surgery, illness, aging. Is it a helpful word for our Haitian neighbors? I'm not sure. Because at this moment God has not parted the waters. There is no discernable path that leads to a safe and sustainable life. They have every reason to be afraid. So, we do our best to walk with them. All of us – we put one foot in front of the other. Put one foot in front of the other. We try to do this not out of anger or cynicism but with love.

In June of this year, hundreds gathered at the Springfield City Hall Plaza to rally in support of local Haitian residents. Those present sang along to a song called "Lead with Love" by Melanie DeMore.

You now have an opportunity to learn and sing this song. Jace, I'll turn things over to you!