

SERMON 23rd August 2026

Almighty God, your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ is the light of the world. May your people, illuminated by your Word, shine with radiance of his glory, that his love may be known in the world as he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Is the universe, the universe that God would want it to be? Is our world, the world that God would want it to be? Is our nation the nation that God would want it to be? Is Corstorphine the community that God would want it to be? Is our congregation, the congregation that God would want it to be? Are our lives (is your life, is my life) the life that God would want you and I to have?

The answer to all these questions is, no. Not because God is uninvolved in the universe or has withdrawn from our lives, but because God is still bringing them to fulfilment. This is not yet the nation that God wants this nation to be. This is not yet the community that God wants us to live in. This is not yet the congregation God wants us to have. We do not yet live the lives that God is renewing by his grace. That is because God is never finished with or absent from our story, our lives, our community, our nation, even the universe, there is always more to come. We are always being called onwards in life, and upwards in virtue.

We know this because the Bible tells us so. And we know this too, just by looking around us this morning. This morning, we mark a milestone in Matthew's and Rebekah's lives as they complete their journey through St. Ninian's Sunday School just at the same time in their lives that they complete also 'real-school', and step out into the world on the adventure of their lives that lies ahead of them.

Some may think; job done. They have completed Sunday School and school; now, surely, they have arrived somewhere, achieved something, and are in some way finished. But, we know, we who have lived many of the years that lie ahead of Matthew and Rebekah, that this is only the beginning of a story. Today may be a milestone, but we know that it is also just a change of chapter, the end of Book 1 and the beginning of Book 2 in their life story.

We know this, too, because the Bible tells us. This morning, we began reading Book 2 of the Bible, the Book of Exodus. Exodus begins by repeating the conclusion of Genesis. Exodus begins, as Genesis concluded, by reporting the death of Joseph. That sounds like the completion of something. Indeed, Exodus then reports that following the death of Joseph, it appeared that through Joseph's extended family, God had completed what he had begun back at the very beginning of creation, back at the beginning of the book of Genesis.

Back at the beginning of the book of Genesis, in chapter one, God created human beings and gave humanity the task to, I quote, "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it."¹ And, here, in our reading this morning, the book of Exodus reports that following the death of Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation, "... the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers, and became so numerous that the land was filled with them."²

¹ Genesis 1: 28

² Exodus 1: 7

Finally, job done. The job God tasked humanity with doing, has, at least in this family, been achieved. It was not achieved easily. The book of Genesis describes how hard it was for people to fulfil this command to “Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth”. To achieve this, people had to overcome crime, confront infertility, make unspeakable sacrifices, and build loving relationships with each other against the odds.

Most significantly, many had to leave the places where they were born and to which they were attached, and emigrate to new places they had never been. These journeys were not always geographical; sometimes people had to leave a household, a settled expectation, or an old way of belonging in order to continue fulfilling God's promise for them. This was never easy, and Genesis does not treat uprooting lightly. Instead, rather than describing them as achievements in themselves, it describes these displacements as costly, but necessary in the service of a promised future.

That idea, that to arrive at the place where God wants us to be, we must leave the place where we have been is the overarching metaphor of the book of Genesis. Now, at the start of the book of Exodus, we might think, hearing that the family of Joseph has become exceedingly fruitful, multiplied greatly, increased in number, and filled the land, that God's chosen family, which began with Abraham, has now arrived and completed what God called people to achieve, having overcome all that has stood in their way. We might think that, but we, who are long in the tooth, should know different. After all, this is just the beginning of another book in the story of humanity.

Whenever we think that we have arrived, we have not. Whenever we think that there is no more change to come, we are wrong.

In the book of Genesis, Abraham became a family, and then an extended family, and that extended family was forced out of Canaan into Egypt by famine. They emigrated and became immigrants. Now, in the book of Exodus these immigrants have become a people, not yet a nation, a people that Pharaoh calls the sons of Israel, the *beney Yisrael* in Hebrew. Now, in the story of Exodus to follow, these people who emigrated out of Canaan and immigrated into Egypt will become in turn emigrants out of Egypt and immigrants into the Promised Land.

If the previous stories in the book of Genesis about the necessity for people to leave one place and go to another place in order to fulfil their calling were not difficult enough, here in the book of Exodus they are about to get worse. In order for the people of Israel to develop from a tribe into a nation, there will be another, much more traumatic leaving and journey. The story that follows is not a simple celebration of movement or settlement. It is a story that forces us to look honestly at human migration; how immigrants are treated in society, why people emigrate to new lands, and what happens to them and to the indigenous population when they arrive there. It is a story that forces us to speak honestly about fear, power, land, belonging, and the suffering caused when one people's survival is made to depend upon another people's loss.

But, alongside this, the book of Exodus, is also a metaphor for our individual lives. It is a story that reminds us that we never truly arrive anywhere, that our lives are always changing, and that we should prepare for change with faith rather than fear.

In Exodus, the sons of Israel will discover that moving from one place to another, as we all must do, can mean a time in the wilderness: treacherous, confusing, distressing, and hard to endure. Yet, it assures us also that the wilderness is not evidence that we have been abandoned, but instead it is the place where we learn how we are sustained, humbled, taught, and where we learn to be lead and to lead, until the promised future opens before us.

What's more, in the New Testament, Christ goes further, and teaches us that enduring a time in the wilderness in order to a future promised is not just about this earthly life, but includes that which lies on the other side of our deaths as well.

If there is one thing that we can tell Rebekah and Matthew this morning as they set out at the beginning of Book 2 of their lives, Exodus, this milestone today is a beginning. There is a promised future ahead of you. To move towards it, you will have to leave some things behind and welcome some things you cannot yet imagine. There may be times when, moving from one to the other, you will feel lost in what seems like a wilderness. But if you endure and remain faithful, you will arrive at your promised future where you will abide for a time before moving on again into a further future.

I suppose the other piece of advice we might impart is that when anyone of us emigrates from the past into the future, and passes through the wilderness that exists between the two, you must not try to undertake this journey alone. To arrive at a future Promised Land, to achieve a future promise, we all need help, guidance, a map, a vision, a guiding light, as well, sometimes, as encouragement from behind, the sort of encouragement that feels like a kick up the backside, or even the unwelcome encouragement of suffering the indignity of a push or a shove.

In the Book of Exodus, it is Moses who provides leadership, often having to administer the kick up the backside, and it is God who is the vision, the guiding light, the pillar of fire that lights the way, focuses attention, shows direction. It is God who will free the sons of Israel from the god-like Pharaoh who was crushing the sons of Israel and holding them back from their promised future. God won't defeat Pharaoh as much as convince the sons of Israel of the extent to which He, God, is the most powerful guide, and the only true guide because it is He, God, who is calling them forward to a promised future of freedom.

For all of us, at whatever stage in life we are, there is a past and there is a future and we are moving from one to another. As we move from one to the other, we will often encounter a wilderness. In that wilderness, we must decide what beacon we will we look to as we journey to the future – will it be the bright light of God's freedom or the deathly darkness of Pharaoh's slavery, and we must decide who will help keep us looking ahead, stepping forward, eyes fixed on the light? For the Israelites, that was Moses, for Christians it is Christ.

There is a future. Wem must go there. To get there, we must travel through the wilderness. Follow the Light. Be guided by Christ.

Now to the one who can keep you from falling and set you in the presence of his glory, jubilant and above reproach, to the only God our saviour, be glory and majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all time, now, and for evermore. Amen.