



**Wading in the Water**  
**Sermon on [Exodus 14](#)**  
**Pastor Julie McCain, September 28, 2014**

*Please pray with me. Speak, O Lord, in words that we can hear, open our hearts to your word, and plant the light of your grace deep in our hearts. Amen.*

I'm going to invite you to open up to number 459, which is called Wade in the Water, and which we'll sing in just a moment, and again at the end of the sermon. It is an African American spiritual, composed and sung by slaves in the American south; we'll only sing the chorus, but if we sang all of the 10 or 12 original verses, we'd see that it was written about the Israelites' deliverance out of Egypt. So let's sing.

[Sing chorus of "Wade in the Water" 3x]

Wade in the water.

→There is a lot of meaning packed into those few words.

Many spirituals, including this one, were used covert part of the Underground Railroad, to warn a runaway slave as to what was coming and how they should respond. The lyrics of this song were used to warn runaways that they were being pursued on land, and that they needed to wade in the water—that they needed to go into a river or other body of water for a while, where their scent could not be tracked.

It's also thought that these spirituals played a significant role in helping the slaves maintain a robust sense of hope in the midst of such horrible circumstances.

- Slaves who learned about Christianity easily began to find parallels between the Biblical story and their own,
- and it makes sense that many found hope in a God who fights for justice and who can make the impossible, possible.

Wading in the water was also meant as an encouragement to fellow slaves. At first, I thought that word choice was quite strange, since the song is based on the Israelite's journey out of Egypt, & we're told that the Israelites were able to cross the Red Sea on dry ground.

But envision what this dry ground they walked on must have looked like. It would have been the water-logged, squishy ground that was used to being at the bottom of a lake. That ground was surely dry enough ground for the people to walk on, but perhaps the strong wind that parted the waters left behind a few puddles,

- which is all just to say that I'm betting crossing the Red Sea required getting their feet wet, and that even that part of the journey was likely a challenge.

→The call to wade in the water is then a word of encouragement to keep trudging onward—to keep trusting God, even when the bottom of our pants are getting wet and we're walking a difficult path.

Or, imagine a second scenario: imagine what the call to wade in the water sounds like to someone who has just reached the Red Sea before the waters have been parted. The situation appears entirely hopeless: there is a sea before them and an army beside them. There appears to be no way out; there is nowhere to go and God appears to have abandoned them entirely.

→In the midst of that sort of hopeless situation, the call is to put our trust entirely in God—to take a step of faith and start wading in the water before God has even parted them, trusting that God will trouble the waters—that somehow, someway, God will make a way.

It's a word of encouragement that the Israelites could have used when they arrived at the Red Sea. We hear that given the situation, they do exactly what we'd expect—they cry out to God in great fear.

Now I think that we are sometimes too quick to judge the Israelites, just as we might be too quick to judge doubting Thomas. Here, and several times when they are wandering in the wilderness, they get scared, and they start asking Moses why God isn't helping them.

→They are forgetful and not very trusting, and it is easy for us to judge them and wonder why they didn't have more faith.

Now it is common to hear faith defined as certainty, the absence of doubt, or I think we could even say the absence of fear. I want to challenge that idea.

→I want to challenge the idea that we have to be fearless and doubtless in order to follow.

It is no accident that many a divine appearance in the Bible, including the one in our text today, begins with these words: Do not be afraid. Don't be afraid.

The fact that these 4 words pop up so often signifies two things:

- First, People in the Bible's are just like us. They're scared, and that's ok, because when they are scared, God is right there with them. It means that when we are afraid, we are in good company with all the saints that have gone before us, and that God is with us, too.
- And 2<sup>nd</sup>), Do not be afraid is not meant as a judgment, as if we are not allowed to be afraid. Rather I think the meaning here is more like: there is no reason to fear.

Over the years, some have similarly teased out the relationship of courage to fear. Many would say that courage is the absence of fear, but a number of folks, have defined it differently. My favorite is from an author named Michael Hyatt. He writes: “Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is the willingness to act in spite of my fear.”

The same could be said about the relationship of fear to faith. Faith is not the absence of fear. It is the willingness to act in spite of our fear and our doubt. It is the willingness to wade in the water.

I imagine that that first step out onto the squishy, dry ground of the red sea was a huge step of faith for the Israelites. And every step after that was a step of faith, too; each step forward probably terrified them, with walls of water beside them that could come crashing down at any moment.

And yet Isaiah 43:2 tells us this:  
When you pass through the waters I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.

Like the Israelites, and all of the Biblical characters:

- We are prone to fear.
- We are prone to wonder how God will provide for us,
- Or how he will get us to the other side of the great seas that sometimes lie before us.

And yet, as we wade in the water, there is indeed no reason to fear.

Because if we think about it, Jesus’ resurrection is another great crossing of a Red Sea, and so really, is the whole Christian story—it is the story of a God

- who makes the impossible, possible,
- who brings hope to hopeless situations,
- and who is with us and for us in ways beyond our wildest imagination.

And with a God like that, you and I can dare to wade in the water.

Sing Chorus of “Wade in the Water” 3x