It is tempting to want to believe that God is on our side. We all certainly want to be on the “right” side of God. I’ve heard countless numbers of individuals, groups, religious bodies make the claim that God is indeed on their side including our very own President. In today’s story of the Exodus we have one of the first accounts of this claim being made…at least in writing. The people of Israel, led by Moses believe that God has helped them attain their liberation from the Egyptians. They say that the Egyptians also feel that God is on the side of the Israelites. This account of the parting of the waters and the chariots being stuck in the mud is a story of a miraculous escape from oppression! While there is no historical evidence that this particular event happened at this time, there is plenty of evidence that the Jewish people are the first people to follow one God and that God chose Moses to lead the people out of Egypt so that they could find a place to worship God freely. By most accounts this happened around 1300 BC. While I think it is easy to say that if God is for us than God is against those we perceive to be our enemies, the fact that the Exodus account is paired with a gospel that says we must forgive as many times as it takes for it to take effect in order for us all to be made whole. This is what God does and this is what we are called to do. We know that God is against war, because God is a God of peace. As we heard in the Exodus story, the Egyptians chased the Israelites in their chariots pulled by horses. The Israelites were on foot. Talk about a power imbalance. The Egyptians actions were certainly war like. We know that God is against oppression. The Israelites who become the Jewish people, have been forced to overcome horrific oppression, degradation, murder throughout the millenia. The Jewish people are still with us today scattered throughout the world living lives of faith and trust in the one God. When I think of people who have been able to make meaning of their lives and forgive their oppressors there are several who come to mind. Viktor Frankl who wrote Man’s Search for Meaning, a book some of us read and discussed in the spring, wrote this: "Everything can be taken from a [person] but one thing: the last of the human freedoms - to choose ones attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose ones own way." This includes whether to choose hate and bitterness or to choose to forgive and continue living in ways that bring meaning to one’s life and the lives of others. Frankl even while living under the most dire circumstances in a concentration camp stripped of all physical comforts was able to find meaning in his existence and to continue his work in psychotherapy after he was liberated. Eva Mozes Kor is another example. She and her twin sister Miriam were part of Mengel’s experiments on twins. They were subject to five months of experiments, 6 days a week for 5-6 hours a day which left her with serious health issues the rest of her life. After returning to Romania, then Israel and finally coming to America in 1965 she became a US citizen. She created a law here in Indiana requiring that the Holocaust and its history be taught to all children in secondary education. Both my children were influenced by her in school. In an article for the Times, Kor states that she came to the realization as an adult that in order for her to heal, she must forgive those people who did horrible things to her in the camps. She spent months writing letters to those who hurt her.[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eva_Mozes_Kor#cite_note-CBSNews-9) She even wrote one to "The Angel of Death". These letters were very hard for her to write but through them she felt she became a happier and healthier person. Not everyone has agreed with her decision to forgive but she felt it was best for her and the right thing to do. This in my opinion is one of the greatest forms of liberation; when a person is able to move beyond something challenging and in this case horrific and live a life of giving to others and the world. Kor was able to somehow move past the great bitterness and resentment inflicted on her by others, and the grief of losing her parents during the holocaust. Eva attended Oscar Groning’s trial 70 years after the Holocaust and thanked him and kissed him for his willingness to testify. This truly shows the depths of her forgiveness. Another Jewish man who comes to mind is Elie Wiesel. Elie was also from Romania when he was taken by the Nazi’s and held in a concentration camp. He was 15 and he too lost most of his family. Elie went on to work through his own grief and anger and help others in the world who suffer through oppression and torture. He won a Nobel Peace prize in 1986 for his work. It’s difficult to look into our world today and see anything beyond our deep divisions. We can talk at one another and disagree and turn to hate and separation or we can actually listen, and give voice to God’s desire for forgiveness and unity in this world. Elie tells us that “We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.” Yes it is true that we have a God of liberation and a God who wants to free the oppressed. A God who picked the Israelites as the first chosen people to worship the one God we all worship. They were the first of many chosen people and indeed all are chosen to be God’s people. This sounds like a great comfort and it is but it also calls us to be like God in our ability to forgive and to live the life we have been called to live as we follow this God of love and forgiveness. Anyone who has ever been hurt or challenged by a person or situation knows what a difficult task this is to actually accomplish. We don’t do it alone, we do it with God’s help and through this community that supports one another and our mission to serve the poor and oppressed in Brown county Indiana. Yes, miraculous freedom does occur when we have the faith to step out into the deep waters and trust in God ‘s presence with us. We can trust that a path will be made for us to do God’s work in this world. If Elie and Eva, surviviors of the holocaust were able to move through the horrors they endured at the hands of the Nazi’s surely there is a path for all of us who seek it. As Paul tells us: We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.