

Tides, Tambourines and Temptations

Exodus 15:19-21; Matthew 4:1-11

Discovery Time for Children

Today we're celebrating an anniversary. Do you know what an Anniversary is? It's a celebration of the number of years a person has been married or has been in a job. And today we're celebrating because it's Mrs. Sally Rehfeldt's 40th Anniversary. She has served our church for 40 years.

The number 40 appears a lot in the Bible. Can you think of places in the Bible that speak of the number 40? One of them is story of Noah.

God tells Noah, "People have gotten really bad. I'm going to get rid of them, but I'm going to save you and your family." And he tells him to build this ark, this big boat.

You remember what happened? After Noah finishes the boat, he puts pairs of all the animals in it and then gets in with his family, and it begins to rain and rain and rain. For (how many days?) Right, for 40 days and nights it rains. And then the sun comes out and the water dries up and Noah and his family and all the animals get out of the ark. And God causes a rainbow to appear in the sky and says, "This is a sign of my promise that I'll never again send a flood to destroy the earth."

It seems to me this church is like an ark. For one thing, just as God brought Noah's family and the animals together in the ark, God brings us together here. For another, just like the flood tide got high and sometimes the waves must have rocked the boat, our church sometime has to endure rough seas. Bad things, like the roof leaking and the plaster falling happen to us.

There's one big difference between the ark and our church, though. During the 40 days on the ark no one could get in or out. During the last 40 years of our church people have come and people have left. Sally didn't leave though. Sally stayed and brought music and tried to bring beauty and harmony to our church.

There's one other thing about this story. God made a promise, and God has kept it all these years. We can always trust God's promises. Sally, we're giving you a rainbow bookmark to remind you of this.

Sermon

The incident described in our Exodus passage comes just after God has saved the children of Israel from the Egyptians. He has parted the Red Sea and brought them through safely. The Egyptians aren't so fortunate. They are swept away as the waters rushed together. The 40 years of journeying through the wilderness has begun.

Now in comparing this journey to your 40 years with us, Sally, I'm not trying to say it's been as much of an ordeal as that trek through the desert. But you do remind me of Miriam. Imagine the scene. Everyone is beside themselves with relief and joy. They're free; they're safe. And Miriam plays her tambourine and leads the women in a song of gratitude and praise to God for what God has done for them. That's what you have done for us. Instead of tambourines, we have bells and the organ. As director of the bells, or the children's choir, or even the adult choir, or as accompanist, you've led us. You've helped us sing our praises to God.

It's not recorded, but I can't imagine a musician like Miriam singing and playing only once during that long journey. Probably Miriam and her friends sang as they sat around the campfire, helping them reflect on God's goodness. Perhaps as they were trudging through the dry dusty desert they sang to encourage the people. They may have sung to prepare them for worship. That's what you have done for us, Sally, for 40 years.

When the children of Israel finally reached the Jordan. Joshua had the elders pick up 12 stones and walk into the river. The river stopped so they could walk across on dry ground. He used the stones to build an altar, to serve as a permanent reminder of what God had done for them, of how God had cared for them.

God has done a lot for us over these 40 years. God has cared for us, too. One of the ways God has cared for us is by sending us leaders like you. So I'm giving you this stone as a reminder of how God has cared for both us and you.

After his 40 days in the wilderness, Jesus faced temptations, just as we do. Like Jesus, Sally has faced and resisted temptations, but those came, not after 40 days of fasting, but all during her 40 years with us. Jesus first refused to turn stones into bread. He refused to be selfish and use his power for himself. Sally, too, refused to keep her gift to herself. She may also have had opportunities to leave us for more money or a better position, but she didn't do it. And if she was

tempted to be lazy and stop practicing –stop doing her best, she never gave in to it. Secondly, Jesus was tempted to use his power to get attention—to show off. Sally never did this either, she plays for God’s glory, not her own. Finally Jesus was tempted to be king, to be in control. Sally may have been tempted to be this way too, but she’s always been a team player. She’s always cooperated with others, which, of course is why she and others have been able to create beautiful music. If Sally can be like Jesus; if she can resist temptations, so can we.

Jesus answered all the temptations by saying what Sally know to be true—that he had to; he wanted to listen to God and obey God. We can do this, too.

Actually, Sally has already had her 40th anniversary. She’s already in her 41st year with us. For the Israelites, the end of the 40 years meant they’d entered the Promised Land. They still had problems, but the desert was behind them. I hope and pray that for Sally and us, that is true as well. I hope and pray that our church is entering a new and exciting time—a time of new vision and new commitment and new areas of service.

One more thing, after Jesus was tempted God sent Angels to minister to him. I believe that God has sent angels to be with us all along, and you, Sally are one of them. That’s why my last gift is this Angel. She doesn’t have a bell, but she does have a trumpet, so at least she’s musical. Thank you for all you do for us.