

## NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Win the Day – Kiss the Wave

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There is a legend in Judaism about a man named Nahshon. He only gets one begat in the Bible of course, that's one more than you and me. He is the great, great, great grandfather of King David. He disappears almost as soon as he makes his debut. But Nahshon is credited with saving the nation of Israel by one act of courage. After their Exodus out of Egypt, the Israelites are trapped between a rock and a hard place Egyptian army - Red Sea, no one knows what to do, there is no way out. That's when God issues a counterintuitive command. He says tell the people of Israel to go forward. The problem with that is this - there was no way forward. They are staring the Red Sea in the face. According to rabbinic tradition this is when the leader of the tribe of Judah steps up and steps into the Red Sea. Nahshan wades into the water like Aqua man. Now, I may have added Aqua man but that's how I envisioned this epic moment. He wades into the Red Sea until he is neck deep right up to his nostrils. This is when and how and where God splits the Red Sea in half. God is the one who makes the sidewalk through the sea but Nahshon makes the miracle possible. How? By wading into the water. The sea saw him says Psalm 114 and fled.

There's an old axiom; "If you want to walk on water, you got to get out of the boat." Here's one more for good measure; "If you want to see God make a sidewalk through the sea, you can't stay on the shore." Most of us spend most of our lives waiting for God to split the Red Sea. Maybe just maybe God is waiting for you to get your feet wet. Maybe just maybe God is waiting for you to wade into the water. Here's what I know for sure, if you want God to do the super, you have to do the natural. You have to take the calculated risk. You have to make the defining decision. You have to take the flying leap of faith.

If you have a Bible, I want you to meet me in Exodus chapter 14. We continue our series "Win the Day". Last week we talked about the first of seven habits - flip the script. This week we talk about two more habits, the second habit 'Kiss the Wave' and a third habit 'Eat the Frog'. Now here's the deal, there are only four weeks in this series, you can do the math there are seven habits. That means we're going to have to do a couple of double headers. And so what I'm gonna do over the next couple of weeks is share a habit as a part of our online gathering but then we'll do a Daily Double, a second message, second habit. You can choose your own adventure; go at your own pace. But can I challenge you during this series? Can we double down as we win the day and we will make that message available on all of our channels, so YouTube, Vimeo, as well as our NCC app.

And so habit number three, 'Eat the Frog' is going to be that Daily Double. I'm going to talk about how to reverse engineer your life goals, turn them into daily habits. We'll talk about habit stacking, habits switching, and we'll make it as simple as 1, 2, 3 - measurable, meaningful, maintainable. And so dial in for that extra message.

Ready or not here we go Exodus 14:13 'Kiss the Wave. Let me set the scene. The Israelites trapped between the Egyptian army, the Red Sea it seems like a no win situation death by sword death by drowning. Put yourself in their sandals for a moment. Imagine the sound of horses and chariots. It had to sound a little bit like Capitol Hill on Wednesday of this week more on that in a minute. Imagine the cloud of dust. The entire Egyptian army is coming at you full throttle. This is fight or flight, am I right? It says the people panicked. But this is when leaders lead. This is when spirit lead leaders step up and step in, this is when spirit filled leaders stay calm and carry on. And that's what Moses does in this moment, verse 13; Moses stands up and says to the people, *"Fear not, stand still and you will see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you today. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."*

Three simple thoughts this weekend, as we Kiss the Wave -

\*One, face your fear

\*Two, stand your ground

\*And three, hold your peace.

I was having coffee with a friend and he has had a migraine headache for years. Moments of relief are few and far between. He's seen specialists; he's tried every treatment plan. Nothing seems to help too much or for too long. The pain became so debilitating that he had to resign the church that he was pastoring. I asked him how do you manage the emotions along with the physical pain and my friend said to me, "I've learned to kiss the wave." I gave him a quizzical look, because I had no idea what he was talking about. He was quoting the famous preacher Charles Spurgeon, who said, I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages. That sentence it's been a source of strength for Lora and I.

In 2017, Lora was diagnosed with breast cancer, it was stage one. She had surgery, we got clear margins. And Lora did everything that you can imagine; changed her diet, we eliminated toxins. Lora and I started hitting comedy clubs because laughter doeth good like a medicine. I mean, we did it all. And a few weeks ago, we found out that the cancer is back, the sucker punch. For a few days you ride this roller coaster of emotions. And I'll speak for myself; I went from sad to mad back to sad. Sad because I love my wife and I don't want to see her have to walk through this mad because she did everything right and then sad all over again. And so on Wednesday, of this week, we got up early. We drove out to the hospital. I spent much of the day in a waiting room as Lora spent much of it in an operating room. Now good news, we think it's non-invasive. Lora is doing good. She is on the road to recovery. As you can imagine we get home and we live on Capitol Hill just a few blocks from the Capitol and it was like the world had turned upside down. I mean, the sirens, the helicopters, the

armored vehicles, I mean, it felt like we were living in a war zone right in our backyard. And I'm thinking about the hundreds of NCC'ers that work on the Hill, as staffers, as members, as MPD or Capitol Police. I'll just say it like it is it was a sad day for democracy.

Last weekend I said that there are days when decades happen. Listen, it seems like January sixth was one of those days. Like you coming off of a surgery and then watching the news my mind is spinning. My heart is spinning so many different emotions. How do you kiss the wave in moments like this? Well, I want to say this for starters, we are here for such a time as this. We are here for such a place as this. I don't care how wide the gap is we stand in the gap as peacemakers, as grace givers, as tone setters. Why? Because we follow the Jesus way and not just on good days, but on bad days.

Listen, January six, those are the days when your wife is in surgery, when the world turns upside down happened to be the 23rd anniversary of losing a loved one, my father in-law. It was a day, it was the day. But those are the days you kiss the wave that throws you against the Rock of Ages.

Let me talk about these three things. One, you got to face your fear. If you've got the Egyptian army coming at you full speed fight or flight but Moses says "*Fear not!*" Easier said than done, no doubt but courage is not the absence of fear. In fact, fear is a prerequisite. The question is how do you manage fear in moments like this? According to psychologists we're only born with two fears; fear of falling and fear of loud noises. Every other fear is learned which means every other fear can be unlearned, Faith is the process of unlearning fear. How? First John 4:18 "*Perfect love casts out all fear*". If you fear God, which is the beginning of wisdom, which means holding God in highest esteem, it means revering God; above all else, if you fear God, you don't have to fear anything else. The fear of God is the cure for every other fear.

Let me push that envelope just a little bit. Pick a fear, any fear. Cure for the fear of failure is not success. The cure the fear of failure is failure in small enough doses that you build up an immunity to it. It works the same way as a vaccination. You need to identify the strain of the fear virus that you're dealing with. Fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of intimacy, fear of the future, fear of certain social situations. You have to identify it, and then you don't avoid it, you actually expose yourself to it in small enough doses that you build up this immunity. In fact, you do what Nahshon did you wade into the water, where that fear resides?

Our first attempt at church planting was a failure. Listen, it was embarrassing. It was confusing. It was depressing, in retrospect, one of the best things that ever happened to us. Why? I learned a very valuable lesson. "*Unless the Lord builds the house, they who labor in vain.*" It also got us from Chicago to DC, which I'm grateful for. When that church plant failed, set us free from failure. How? I can't really explain it, but we just built up a little bit of immunity. And we discovered that God is right there to pick you back up, dust you off and give you a second chance. Nine times out of 10 failure is a result of poorly

managed success and success is the result of well managed failure. It's about learning the lesson; it's about cultivating the character in those situations.

I want to add one more thing to the mix and this is so critical, especially in a week where Lora and I are so grateful for a spiritual family that surrounded us with so much love and prayer as we kissed the wave. Can I remind us; we are a community of faith. What does that mean? It means we bear each other's burdens. It means we build each other's faith. We eat faith for breakfast, lunch and dinner. And what that means is this; you ought to dream a little bit bigger, you ought to pray a little harder. You ought to think a little longer because you're part of this. We set God-size goals. Listen, we elevate and activate one another's faith and it creates herd immunity against fear.

Let me double back to the Red Sea. Moses says "Fear not." One translation says do not panic. This passage this promise holds tremendous significance for us as a church. In October of 2009 Lora and I were having coffee in Old Town Alexandria. It was a Monday morning coffee date and I made the mistake of answering my phone. It was the manager of the movie theaters at Union Station. We had met there for 13 years. Fun fact, at one point, we thought about changing the name of the church, to The Church at Union Station, because that's what people called us. And she tells me that the theater is shutting down. What? Sucker punch! And then I'm like, when? In one week. What, what the what? How do you move a congregation at that point measured about 1,000 people in one week? Listen, I knew we needed a word from God and we got one. Of all the passages I've preached over 25 years, Exodus 14:13 may be the most meaningful to me personally.

I remember exactly what I said that weekend, "I don't know what we're gonna do but I know what we're not going to do. We are not going to panic. We're going to stand still. And we're going to see the deliverance of the Lord." And we did. It was that closed door that set the stage. We engaged a realtor right on the heels of the great recession 2008. And wouldn't you know it, found a piece of property with a block of frontage on Virginia Avenue on 695. It took a couple of miracles including a \$3 million miracle that led to the Miracle Theatre. That's why we called it the Miracle Theatre that led to the Navy Yard Car Barn, the city block that is now our Capitol Hill Campus. If you trace those miracles back to their origin, you will arrive at a rock and a hard place; you will arrive at Exodus 14:13 but there is a God who makes sidewalks through the sea. And it's in the moments where you don't know where to go, you don't know what to do those are the moments you trust him a little bit more. We are not a people who panic not even on January 6th, especially not on January 6th. His kingdom is going to come His will is going to be done. Church don't lose faith in the end of the story.

2020 was tough 100 different ways. Again, not a dumpster fire a refiners fire. But guess what? We didn't panic? No, by faith we believe that God wanted to make some sidewalks through the sea and that's what he did. We decided to wade into the waters of racial tension and political polarization. What happened? Served 55,000 meals through the DC Dream Center. You gave more than \$600,000 to a COVID relief fund that has helped us bless 1,000s of people. We got innovative by initiating the upper

zoom, where hundreds of people gathered during the week to pray, the NCC daily and our online campus we're reaching about 168 nations touching tens of 1,000s of people week in and week out. We formed a multicultural team in response to the racial tension. And our vision is to become this beloved community that embodies racial unity. We're going to wade into the water of racial tension, political polarization, and we're going to see God continue to make some sidewalks through the sea.

Can I tell you what I've come to terms with? I can't say a single thing without someone taking offense; you know what I've learned? It's never enough. It's always too much. I post a prayer, that prayer is gonna get misinterpreted somehow, some way. It is what it is. It's the culture that we live in. But I had to personally just make some decisions. I'm going to put my pride and prejudice on the altar. I'm not going to take offense; I'm not going to stay silent. I'm going to do what I feel like God is leading me to do. I'm going to kiss that wave and trust that God is going to make some miracles happen.

One final thought on facing your fear. All of us want a miracle, none of us want to be in a situation that necessitates it but you cannot have one without the other. So you find yourself in one of those circumstances it feels like there's no way out, it feels no win. Listen, I'm trusting God to put his glory on display once again. One, you have to face your fear. Two, you have to stand your ground. Now the NLT says, stand still, the NIV stand firm, the Amplified, take your stand the GNT, stand your ground. Whichever way you slice it, what would be the hardest thing to do if the Egyptian army is coming at you full speed? I think the answer is to stand still.

There's a scene in Ford versus Ferrari, where Carroll Shelby the racecar driver played by Matt Damon says there's a point at 7,000 RPM where everything fades. The machine becomes weightless just disappears all that's left is a body moving through space and time. 7,000 rpm that's where you meet it, that's where you feel it. It creeps up on you and it asks you a question, the only question that really matters? Who are you? Remember what we talked about last week? You need to know your name. Now I have no idea what thoughts are firing across his synapses, but the mind of Moses has to be going 7,000 RPM. Where do we go? What do we do? I wonder if he has a flashback to this moment at the burning bush. Do you remember when he asked God the question "*Who am I?*" What I love is the fact that God answers the question by not answering the question that Moses asked, but by answering the question that Moses should have asked. What does God say? "*I will be with you.*" Listen that's all we need to know, right? That God is with us and for us.

These are the moments we discover who we are and who God is. Now, in crisis situations I go back to ground zero, I go back to the foot of the cross and make a beeline for the empty tomb and I go back to the promises of God. "*He who began a good work is going to carry it to completion.*" "*God is preparing good works in advance.*" "*All things work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purposes.*" "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" I then go back to some of those old classics 'Great is Thy Faithfulness' or 'Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.' I go back to daily spiritual disciplines. You have got to ground yourself in the Word of God; you

have to anchor yourself to the promises of God. I'm going to add one thing to the mix. You also have to embrace the pain and suffering.

When Lora was first diagnosed with breast cancer three years ago, she came across a piece of poetry that posed a question; I want you to write this down. What have you come to teach me? It's a hard question to ask, might even be more difficult to answer it. But listen denial ain't just a river in Egypt. It's the first stage of grief. You cannot get stuck in the stages of grief; denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. This is where so many of us get stuck but you have to wade into the grief to come out the other side. By the way, according to David Kessler, there is a sixth stage its called meaning. Now, that feels funny quoting Frederick Nietzsche on this count, but Nietzsche said, "He who has a why to live can bear almost anyhow." May God bring you to a place of meaning on the other side of the grief.

Three, you need to hold your peace. Now there is an ancient tradition practiced in Orthodox churches, called pass the peace. That actually traces back to the Sermon on the Mount. If you're offering a gift, realize you're at odds with someone go and be reconciled to that person. That's how you counteract racial tension and political polarization. You interrupt the pattern. How? You love your enemies, you pray for those who persecute you. You bless those who curse you. You pass the peace. Why? Cuz you are a peace maker. But it's really hard to pass the peace unless you know how to hold the peace internally. Let's be honest, a lot of people lost their peace in 2020. A third of Americans are struggling with anxiety and depression.

How do you hold your peace when it feels like the train is going off the tracks? Around the same time Lora and I were planting National Community Church, there was a Jewish rabbi on the other side of town up in Bethesda named Edwin Friedman. And he's famous for this idea of being a non anxious presence. I love this, I think of it as staying calm and carrying on. If you follow the Prince of Peace, then part of it is being this non anxious presence and with it, we shift the atmosphere around us.

Now I know this weekend, some of you are kissing the wave, you're between a rock and a hard place, and our prayer team is ready and waiting, we want to pray with you, pray for you. In fact, can I just challenge you to do something? If you're at our online campus in that chat would you just be willing to share? What fear are you gonna face? What promise are you standing on? What wave do you need to kiss? And maybe what stage are you stuck in, in those stages of grief? Why would I share that? Because there's something that's powerful that happens when we confess and profess the things because the enemy wants you to keep it a secret because then it paralyzes us. But as you begin to verbalize those things, sometimes it... Guess what Nahshon took the first step and it gave the rest of those Israelites the courage to follow him. And all of them experienced a miracle. Why? Because one person had the courage to go first.

Let me close with this. If you want to kiss the wave you have to face your fear? You have to stand your ground. You have to hold your peace. Nothing easy about those things, asier said than done, no doubt.

But I love what happens next. "Then the Lord said to Moses, why are you crying out to me?" I think some of us have a tendency to ask God to do for us what God is asking us to do for him. God says, "Tell the Israelites to go forward." I don't know what step of faith you need to take but I do know this the first step is always the hardest step. You have to overcome the law of inertia by exercising initiative. You have to overcome fear by exercising faith. If you need marriage counseling, it is so hard to wade into those waters. Ahh but it could save your marriage. If it's losing weight, it is so hard to wade into those waters especially if you've waded a time or two. If it's resolving conflict or training for a marathon or writing books, whatever it is really hard to take that first step but if you want God to do the super you need to do the natural. If you want God to make a sidewalk through the sea, you've got to wade into the water and you have to kiss the wave.

Two kinds of people in the world, we're done with this - plotters and plodders. Better spell the difference; plotters with two T's, plotters with two D's. Plotters are those people who see the far off future. They have vision beyond their resources. They set God-size goals, they dream the unthinkable, they attempt the impossible. I admire plotters with two T's. But I'll tell you who I admire even more, plodders with two D's. These are the people who get up every morning and just win the day. They stay humble and stay hungry. They stay in their lane and they stay the course. Nahshon is the patron saint of plodders with two D's. I mean what have you had stopped after stepping into the water? Well, that didn't work. Or what have you quit when he was waist deep? It's just not happening. Well, what if he had turned around when he reached his chinny chin chin? That was a waste of time and energy. We give up too soon. We give up too easily. Come on church. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus the author and finisher, finisher, finisher of our faith for the joy that was set before him he endured the cross. In other words, he kissed the wave for you and for me.

If you want to take the first step of faith this weekend, do you have the courage to raise your hand? You'll see the button raise your hand and our team wants to pray with you and pray for you. If you want that relationship with God, and today is your day you take that step, you wade into the water and you see what God does.