

Crossing the Jordan

Joshua 3:7-4:7

⁸God said to Joshua, "This very day I will begin to make you great in the eyes of all Israel. They'll see for themselves that I'm with you in the same way that I was with Moses. You will command the priests who are carrying the Chest of the Covenant: 'When you come to the edge of the Jordan's waters, stand there on the river bank.'"

⁹⁻¹³Then Joshua addressed the People of Israel: "Attention! Listen to what God, your God, has to say. This is how you'll know that God is alive among you—he will completely dispossess before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites. Look at what's before you: the Chest of the Covenant. Think of it—the Master of the entire earth is crossing the Jordan as you watch. Now take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man from each tribe. When the soles of the feet of the priests carrying the Chest of God, Master of all the earth, touch the Jordan's water, the flow of water will be stopped—the water coming from upstream will pile up in a heap."

¹⁴⁻¹⁶And that's what happened. The people left their tents to cross the Jordan, led by the priests carrying the Chest of the Covenant. When the priests got to the Jordan and their feet touched the water at the edge (the Jordan overflows its banks throughout the harvest), the flow of water stopped. It piled up in a heap—a long way off—at Adam, which is near Zarethan. The river went dry all the way down to the Arabah Sea (the Salt Sea). And the people crossed, facing Jericho.

¹⁷And there they stood; those priests carrying the Chest of the Covenant stood firmly planted on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while all Israel crossed on dry ground. Finally the whole nation was across the Jordan, and not one wet foot.

³When the whole nation was finally across, God spoke to Joshua: "Select twelve men from the people, a man from each tribe, and tell them, 'From right here, the middle of the Jordan where the feet of the priests are

standing firm, take twelve stones. Carry them across with you and set them down in the place where you camp tonight.”

⁴⁻⁷ Joshua called out the twelve men whom he selected from the People of Israel, one man from each tribe. Joshua directed them, “Cross to the middle of the Jordan and take your place in front of the Chest of GOD, your God. Each of you heft a stone to your shoulder, a stone for each of the tribes of the People of Israel, so you’ll have something later to mark the occasion. When your children ask you, ‘What are these stones to you?’ you’ll say, ‘The flow of the Jordan was stopped in front of the Chest of the Covenant of GOD as it crossed the Jordan—stopped in its tracks. These stones are a permanent memorial for the People of Israel.’”

We continue our journey with the Israelites as we explore what exactly are the elements of our faith as the people of God. As we may remember, at this point in the story, the Israelites have already been wandering the wilderness for forty years. And they have finally reached the edge of the promise land. This is a transition point in the people’s journey. They are realizing what was known has passed away. Moses is no longer their leader. The old ways of being community will no longer work in this new land. Their understanding of who they are as the people of God continues to transform as they become the people God created and calls them to be.

At this point in the story, the people have reached a turning point in their journey. They are about to enter in the promise land under the leadership of Joshua. They are not sure of what they will encounter once they reach the other side. All they know is that they have the promise of God to guide them.

But just as they are about to enter in the promise land, the people encounter another obstacle-the river Jordan which is flooded. We are told that it is harvest time and the river's banks are overflowing. This is an important detail because normally the river can be crossed without too much trouble. But now, when the people are ready and anxious to begin the next stage of their journey, the river is flooded. It appears as if the people are being prevented from making their way into the promise land.

Of course the people have a choice...they could continue with what they had been doing before this moment....wandering in the wilderness but this would mean they would never have a land of their own. This would mean that they would have to abandon their destiny of freedom and well-being. Or...Or the people could journey forward, crossing the river, trusting that God would make a way out of no way like God has done so many times before.

The choice is clear. The people have heard the stories of how their ancestors crossed the Red Sea, how God had parted the waters just when they had lost all

hope. With the Egyptian army bearing down on them, ready to take them back to captivity, God made a way out of no way for them. The people have heard the stories of how God overcame the chaos and brought the people safely to the other side. And now it is their turn, their turn to experience this miracle. It is their turn to see God parting the waters, bringing them safely to the other side.

Now for us as readers, we could easily end our story here for this morning. After all, we know that God would never go back on God's promises. God will see the people safely through the other side. We could easily end of the story at this moment because as people of faith, we are once again reminded that God will always take care of us. And who doesn't need or want that reminder, especially as we continue to watch our world be filled with so many unknowns...the virus continues to plague us and create so much uncertainty. Protests continue to fill our streets because we finally have the courage to name the oppression which is the very foundation of the broken systems which govern our world. So much has been brought to light. We can no longer ignore the brokenness which fills our world nor can we pretend it doesn't affect us because of our privilege. Again in the midst of all this, who doesn't need or want the assurance that God will always take care of us.

But as I sat down to write this sermon, I know that the Spirit of God is calling us to more. As people of faith, we are called to see how our stories fit into

the larger narrative, the larger narrative of how God is moving in and among us, bringing us back to life. You see, the people's story doesn't end with this reassurance of God's care. The people's journey doesn't end because they trusted God. Their journey, their story as the people are challenged to come together, all represented, and to make their way through the obstacles united as one community.

We are told that unlike the crossing of the Red Sea, where one man follows God's word to see the people to safety, this crossing is different. At this turning point in the people's journey, God invites them to see this crossing into the promise land as an opportunity to shape their destiny. This crossing will take the whole community, working together. This crossing will take the whole community being represented and seen. This crossing will show the people that it is their calling as ones who are set apart for the building of God's Kingdom here on Earth, that it is their calling to be the first to brave the waters and create a path so that all can journey towards healing and wholeness.

And here's why I say this: God calls upon Joshua to have the people select a person from each of the tribes of Israel. This becomes a visible reminder to the people of their connection to the larger community. No one tribe is singled out nor is one left out. Then God tells Joshua to have the priests cross the river first and the people will follow. As soon as the priests' feet touch the edge of the water, the waters part and the people walk across the Jordan into the new land. Then after

everyone has crossed, Joshua tells the twelve representatives to take a stone and create an enduring memorial for the people so that they would always remember this moment in their journey. This moment is marked with a visible reminder of how they came together for their journey into the promise land. This moment is marked so that the people will never forget that their connection through community is essential to becoming the people God created and calls them to be.

Like the Israelites in our text, we as people of faith have come to a turning point in our journey. We could easily let the story end here and stay where we are wandering in the wilderness or...or we can trust that God will make a way out of no way as we come together as the Body of Christ. As ones who have been set apart for the work of building up the Kingdom of God here on Earth, we are called to be the first to brave the waters, making a way through the brokenness and suffering which floods our world, making a way so that all can experience healing and wholeness, making a way so that all are seen and embraced as Beloved Children of God no matter their skin color, sexuality, gender orientation or ethnicity.

Because we know that as the Body of Christ, we cannot proclaim we welcome all until all are represented at the Table. And we know that is not going to happen until we as the Body of Christ, as the Church, are brave enough to take that

first step, brave enough to create the way through the obstacles which prevent us from truly experiencing God's Shalom here on Earth as it is in heaven.

Because we know that is truly the only way we are ever going make it into the promise land. Amen.