

Joshua 3:7-17

7 The Lord said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. 8 You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, 'When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.' " 9 Joshua then said to the Israelites, "Draw near and hear the words of the Lord your God." 10 Joshua said, "By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: 11 the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan. 12 So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. 13 When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off; they shall stand in a single heap."

14 When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people. 15 Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, 16 the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho.

17 While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.

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In a few minutes I will bless you with Moses' words and another worship service will have been planned, conducted, and then I hope all of us will go downstairs to meet at the table once again. We do it every year at this time. And for various reasons we like to have a communal meal every month to six weeks.

We will hear the food prayed over, get in line, get our food, visit while we are eating it, listen to the program-- today it is about how your church leadership wants to spend the money you give in the most faithful way we can. So you will probably see a proposed budget, and maybe some other stuff as well. It's about how we might use our resources carefully and faithfully for the sake of our Lord. The program will be about how we make our words come alive, to move in the world and communicate the message of Jesus Christ, to act on his words. Then some will stay to help clean up, but eventually we will find our transportation home, walk into wherever it is we live and do whatever it is we will do.

If you are like me, you don't think about it much. All of this just kind of happens. When we get home probably we'll change clothes, find something a little more comfortable to wear, then, I don't know, what time are the Bengals playing today? Will it be yet another black out, or will we get to watch the game on the tube? Or maybe there's a project you have

planned, or a good book, or one of my favorite Sunday afternoon activities: a nap. Time passes. The brief minutes become lengthy hours and life goes on. Daylight becomes dark and today it will remind us that once again that next Sunday is nearly upon us and it will be time to turn our clocks back.

It is all so predictable that we barely give it a second thought. Well, once a month we give it a second thought. That's because very little-- if any of that is free. Take it all for granted if you want to, but once a month it's time to sit down and, if you're an old school person like I am, you have to write those checks.

Take for granted that when you leave the building, your car will be in the parking lot. Not everybody can do that when they leave church. The majority of the world's population does not own a car. And when you do get into your car to drive home, where is home? For most of us, home is not within easy walking distance of church. Most Christians either live within walking distance of their church, or they start one where they are. I take pride in the number of you who pass other churches to worship here until I think of the people who pass us by to worship at another church.

We mustn't take the church for granted because like so many other things in our lives, it costs money to maintain. It costs many volunteer hours to keep it going. Over the years we have called on many of you to employ your God given skills and training to help make the mission and administration of this church happen. If these resources are no longer available then the alternative is not something that we want to think about.

But wait, we have to think about it. So maybe that's not a bad thing after all. We have driven ourselves to the place where we have to act, but before we act we must ask certain questions. Why we are here? What difference do we make?

It's like we, too, are standing on the bank of the Jordan waiting for the signal to cross. Waiting for the Ark of the Covenant to be paraded before us and settled before us to enable us to cross over. God had promised those people a land that was flowing with milk and honey. Until that time in the history of Israel, all they had was the memory of the ancestors who had spoken about life in Egypt, and how hard that was. But even then they could take for granted the fact that they would lie down in misery and arise in anticipation of another day in the clay pits, the probability of the overseer's lash, bad food and bad water.

For the younger people, those who had survived the wilderness was the memory of wind and stinging dust, day after day of wandering from this oasis to that oasis for forty years. It was the memory of a community that God had called into existence to fulfill God's purpose. Things did not go so well for Israel either as slaves or as free wanderers. They were the author of their own misfortune and though God was tempted to forsake Israel, that never happened, no matter how often Israel broke their promises to God.

Our lesson for this morning brings all of that to mind; all of the hell that Israel had gone through no matter whose fault it was-- now they were, in the words of 18th century hymn composer, William Williams-- "treading the verge of Jordan". And what could that mean?

It would mean that nothing would ever be the same again.

But guess what? You don't have to be standing on a riverbank after 40 years of wandering in the desert in order to recognize that nothing will ever be the same again. Change is as certain as tomorrow and as uncertain. We deny that at our peril, and yet deny it we do, hoping that so long as we are marginally content, nothing will change very much.

But God is alive and well and among us. I believe that our current situation has happened for many reasons, but the key reason we are where we are is so that we will not take anything about the Community of Faith Presbyterian Church for granted. We have seen how taking someone or something for granted can destroy relationships, families, businesses, clubs, organizations and churches, especially churches.

It is precisely because we cannot take our church for granted that I believe this church will thrive. That discomfort that you feel about the future of the church is not a bad thing. Sometimes we need discomfort to get us to move. I remember reading some novel by Ken Follett many years ago where he described a Bedouin marooned in the desert with a camel who would no longer move. The way that the Bedouin got the camel to move was to start a fire, right next to the camel!

A certain degree of anxiety is not a bad thing to mingle with many other good things that happen because of our presence here. It keeps us awake and alert but hopefully will not prevent us from the necessary risks we must take from time to time in order to live out the Gospel.

Next week we will ask for your pledges. All I ask of you is that you think about how our community will be affected if we were not here. Try to imagine it. This community I'm speaking about is not only about the work we do around here, but it is work that extends deeply into Central America. It is work that extends into the lives of youngsters and their families in Ludlow. It is part of the work we do as individuals: where and how we volunteer.

Do we have a God ordained obligation to that larger community? Of course we do otherwise what purpose is there behind our existence? And if we were not here?

"When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side.

Songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to Thee;
I will ever give to Thee.

AMEN