

The Federated Church of Hyannis

May 16, 2021

SERMON: CROSSING INTO UNCHARTED TERRITORY

SCRIPTURE: Joshua 3: 1-17

Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. After three days the officers went throughout the camp, giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it." Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you." Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people." So they took it up and went ahead of them. And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.'" Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD--the Lord of all the earth--set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap." So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

INTRODUCTION

Today's Sermon is called "Crossing into Uncharted Territory". The reason for that is many of us are beginning to see the transformation as restrictions are lifted. We are entering into uncharted territory.

A couple weeks ago I was tucking my son into bed and he asked me if COVID was like this when I was growing up? Children have that way of looking at the world. To him it seemed like this was something past generations had experienced. In his mind, the grownups know what to do because we survived it before. This was right before the schools were transitioning back to

full day in-person. He wanted to know what comes next. I told him the truth. I said I don't know what comes next. None of the grownups know what comes next. We have never been through anything like this before in our lifetime, but all the grownups are doing our best to protect kids and keep them safe for whatever comes next.

I want to be honest with everyone here at the church. I don't know what comes next. Every Pastor around the world is trying to figure out what that means with churches finally pivoting to a post COVID surge world. I say surge because we know we still have COVID, but we seem to have crossed the plain of the surge. We prayed for this day to come. And now the time has come for us to cross over into the new uncharted territory.

Next week here at the Federated Church, like many other churches on Pentecost Sunday, we are returning to in-person worship. After 422 days since our remote online worship services began, we will be open on Sundays for worship. The re-opening committee has recommended we proceed with the move to in-person worship again. I know many have been waiting for this day to finally come. There is something I feel is important to share. I don't know what pre-Covid Federated Church looked like. I can't lead us back to the way it was, I can only lead us to where we need to go. All of us are entering into new uncharted territory. The unknown can be challenging but it also can be rewarding.

PART 1: MOSES AND JOSHUA

The passage today comes from the Book of Joshua. You may remember from Sunday School when you were earning perfect attendance pins that once upon a time there was a famine in the land and Joseph and his brothers moved to Egypt. Over time the family grew and Pharaoh forgot about Joseph and the Hebrew people became slaves in Egypt. But God promised to lead them out of Egypt to the land God had promised Abraham for his descendants. God, using Moses, liberated the Hebrew people from Egypt and lead them into the wilderness. But because they sinned in the wilderness God chose to not let the present generation cross over into the Promise Land. God would keep them in the wilderness and one day would lead the next generation of Hebrew people into the Promise Land. Moses led them into the wilderness, but Joshua led them out of the wilderness.

When Moses died, the Lord spoke to Joshua and three times the Lord says to Joshua, "be strong and courageous". God chose Joshua to lead the people into the Promised Land. If you have ever tried getting children out the door, you know what a challenge that can be. Joshua was about to lead a whole nation across the Jordan River into a new territory, and to make a transition like that, one must be strong and courageous. Stepping into the unknown takes strength and courage.

PART 2: WHAT IS MINISTRY?

When someone asks me what ministry is, I often share this example with them. I describe it as taking a step of faith trusting that the Lord will lead you through it.

I will never forget my first night as a hospital Chaplain. I was 24 years old at the time. My residency was with Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago, which is a Level 1 Trauma Hospital. About 3 hours into my first shift, I get a page on my pager. I report to the ER about midnight and the nurse tells me they have a DOA (Dead On Arrival). It was a 16-year-old kid who was hit by a stray bullet. He was shot in the leg. Most people might think a person could survive a bullet to the leg. The bullet hit the artery and he bled out on the way to the hospital. The nurse told me the family was waiting in the waiting room and I needed to do the notification. I am 24 years old; it is my first night at the hospital, and my job is to do a casualty notification to a family of a kid 8 years younger than me. Ministry is stepping into the unknown and trusting God will lead you through it.

I walked into the waiting room, met with the family in the counseling area, and gave the mother the news her son was dead. Then I brought the doctor in to explain what had happened medically. I stayed with that family until there Pastor came relieve me. There is no training that prepares a person for that, but I learned more in that moment than in the years I spent in seminary about what ministry is. Ministry is taking that step of faith and trusting God to lead you through the unknown.

PART 3: JOSHUA LEADING INTO THE UNKNOWN

God instructed Joshua to be strong and courageous. Joshua was about to lead the people into the unknown. But Joshua knew a little bit what to expect. He had sent spies into the territory across the Jordan River to see what was waiting on the other side. What was there was Jericho, a strong walled city inhabited by giants. Almost any military strategist would have said go around it, but God instructed Joshua to go through it.

Joshua is a military leader in the Bible because we know of the many campaigns he fought in battle. Joshua leads a group of untrained soldiers with little supplies living in the wilderness across a river to attack a fortified city occupied by giants. And as far as we know Joshua has had no military training or ever fought in a battle up to this point. But because the Lord has commanded him to be strong and courageous Joshua steps into the unknow trusting God.

PART 4: DIRECTIONS

In Joshua 3:4 the officers in the camp give the instructions to the people to follow the ark of the covenant. They say, “then you will know the way to go since you have never gone this way before”. They give very clear and simple directions to help the people safely cross the river, which was known to flood that time of year. As soon as the priests entered the water carrying the ark of the covenant, the water stopped flowing. Often it requires a step of faith trusting that if we do our part, God will handle the other parts.

Following directions should be a simple and easy thing to do. I can tell you it is not simple or easy. When I went off for my military training it took months to learn followership. They start

off with marching turning left and right. It takes time to learn how to move in a large group carrying gear to not trample over someone. Following directions is a hard thing.

CONCLUSION

Next week will be a beginning of new uncharted territory for many of us as we return to in-person worship. I can't lead us back to what we were before COVID because it will be new uncharted territory as we move forward. I ask that we be kind, patient, and understanding as we move forward.

Faith is stepping into the unknown. Every Pastor is doing their best to be able to move forward through this pandemic. This is a once in a lifetime moment. Things will be different as we cross over the horizon into a post-COVID world. But like uncharted territory there is opportunity and potential ahead. This is a time to take the step of faith and trust that God will lead us forward like God did for Joshua and the Hebrew people.