

Markers
From the Bible: Joshua 4: 1-7

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For nearly 30 years, these two manila file folders have either been on my desk or the first two files in my desk drawer. Both are filled with notes and articles and scraps of paper. Some I found and saved. Others were handed to me.

- An Op-ed piece written by a general in the army about the people he considers to be heroes.
- A poem by Mary Oliver and a reflection by the author Annie Dillard.
- A speech from 2003 made on the Senate floor by Senator Robert Byrd sent to me by a friend.

One way or another, all of it found their way into one of these two folders because they were and are sermons waiting to be preached.

In addition to what was inside, on the outside are my scribbled notes. Quotes from something I heard or read which caught my attention and which I did not want to forget. Also sermons waiting to be preached.

- *“Let your heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God.” - Bob Pierce*
- *“There are no ordinary people. You have never met a mere mortal.” - C.S. Lewis*

And this...

What is truer than true?

The answer. *A story.*

And so this morning, this story which I have told before and so you might remember it.

But, like all good stories, it deserves to be told again.

And, this morning is the morning to tell it.

So, as Prologue to the story, this two minute Bible study.

You may recognize his name.

Moses. Patriarch of the Jewish people.

The first five books of Hebrew Scripture are named for him.

While watching his father-in-law's sheep he encountered the burning bush and through that experience went to Pharaoh to free the Israelites who were slaves in Egypt.

He led the people as they fled for their lives.

He parted the Red Sea.

He was given the 10 Commandments.

Through it all, he guided the Israelites as they wandered for all those years in the wilderness dreaming of the land they believed God had promised them.

Moses never quite got there. He died on Mt. Nebo able to see the Promised Land, but not set foot on it. Following the death of Moses, Joshua, whose name means *God saves* or *God saves the people* (And whose name in Koinonia Greek, the language of Christian scripture, would be Jesus. Remember that when you read the gospel narratives) is chosen as the heir apparent.

That's the Bible study.

Here is the story.

From the Paul Alcorn version of Joshua 4.

After mourning the death of Moses, the wilderness wandering continues.

Eventually Joshua and the Israelites find themselves standing on the banks of the Jordan River.

That boundary...

Both literally and figuratively...

Between homelessness and a home

Between wandering and stability.

Between wilderness and Promised Land.

Between Life and Death.

Finally arriving at that time and place they had dreamed of for so long, the people are about to joyfully splash their way across the river when Joshua tells them to stop. And gives them this instruction: *As you cross the river, take a stone from the river. Carry it across. And make a pile of your stones on the other side.*

You can imagine the reaction.

The polite translation would be something like, "Joshua, why?"

Then this.

Which is the point of the story and what I hope you remember.

In response to their "Why," Joshua tells them this:

So, in the days to come, when you are walking along the banks of the river with your children or your grandchildren and they see that out of place pile of stones and ask you why it is there, you will have the opportunity to tell them the story...again.

That's the story.

And, this is why it is the story for today.

First, thank you.

Thank you for the markers...

For the pile of stones...

You have left along the way over these last 30 years for me to see.

Markers which reminded me over and over again of what is important.

Markers which reminded me both of who I am and who I am called to be.

Reminded me of who we are and who we are called to be.

Looking back I am keenly aware of some of those moments.

Others, I am sure, will find their way to the surface in the days and weeks to come.

I can't thank you enough.

You have been kind and courageous and generous and visionary and, in real time, life and world changing.

I am very much aware I am who I am because of who you are and who you have been.

Thank you.

Along with each of you, I selected a stone from one of the baskets.

I am not sure where it will end up in our house in Vermont.

On the bookcase.

Next to our bed.

On my desk.

But somewhere, as that reminder...

That marker...

That you have left from me to see.

And, this reminder...

Each day we leave markers for others to see.

Our children.

Our neighbors.

Our co-workers.

The larger community.

Whether they say it out loud or just to themselves, when they see the pile of stones you leave behind they ask, "*Why?*" And in that moment you/we have the opportunity to, once again, give voice to the values we understand to be wrapped up in our vision of God's Kingdom come.

What we remind each other of each and every Sunday.

Loving God.

Loving neighbor.

Treating others as we would like to be treated. As they would like to be treated.

Caring for those too often pushed to the edges.

Extending welcome.

Letting the light you know and the light you have shine in the darkness.

Living with open hands and open hearts.

As you have done for me, continue to leave markers to others remember the story and so find our way.

This morning I gave you a stone.

From me to you.

May it be a reminder left in your path.

For you to see and to remember.