

## **ZIONSVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**REV. JIM CAPPS- DECEMBER 9, 2012**

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### **"A DAY TO CROSS OVER"**

#### **JOSHUA 3:1-13**

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Today, I am doing something I have done very few times in my years as a minister, I am changing my scriptural text and subject of my words to you. Through the years, my preparation for the future, takes us out 6-12 months. In a way far beyond my doing, time and time again the passage has been appropriate for the day when we actually delve into it. God is good, all the time.

There are two reasons for the change this morning. First, I knew that Kevin Schmidt would be sharing the momentous news with you that we have gained approval from our Presbytery to begin the search for a new pastor. I agree with anyone who thinks this has been a long time coming and needs to be a top priority for us at this time. We are beginning a crucial step in the history of the church. It is a step which has only taken place one other time, when Glenn McDonald was called to your pastor nearly 30 years ago.

My second reason for changing what I am speaking to you about this morning comes from the wonderful privilege I have in digging into the Bible each week on Thursday mornings with the women of the Life Changes Bible Study. I was strangely moved by Joshua 3 as I studied it with them and shared my ideas about it the Thursday before last. Joshua 3 presents the account of the children of Israel crossing over the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Like us here at ZPC, they were in a season of momentous decision as they entered uncharted territory.

This study of Joshua has sent my mind scurrying back to two momentous times of transition our family passed through. The first happened in 1983 when Alice and I moved from Belleville, Illinois where I had served for 11 years as an assistant, associate, and co-pastor. We were moving from a fairly staid community of about 45,000 people to West St. Louis County, which was growing quickly and had maybe a million people within a half hour drive. It might be like moving from Franklin to Carmel. Finding it difficult to believe that they were really calling me, the Pastoral Nominating Committee said it was like the Red Sea opening before the Children of Israel in the Exodus.

The second momentous transition for us took place when God called us in 1995 from St. Louis to Southport, here on the Southside of Indianapolis. Before the PNC started their searching, they looked for a biblical character to personify the pastor for whom they would be searching. That person was none other than Joshua. They were looking for someone who would help them move from their 7 acre campus, in a neighborhood, next to an elementary school to a 30 acre parcel of land close to I-65 where projected development was about to take place. They surmised that moving from the comfortable and the familiar to an unknown future would be like crossing the Jordan River and into the Promised Land.

On this second Sunday in Advent, as we anticipate celebrating Christmas, Joshua 3 seems very appropriate for us, here at ZPC, this morning. In the Exodus from Egypt 40 years before, Israel had been birthed as a nation. In February, ZPC will celebrate our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

For the next 40 years, Israel wandered in the wilderness. This is where the analogy breaks down. Over the past 30 years, ZPC saw growth and fruitfulness like very few Presbyterian Churches in our country. You grew to over 2000 members with more than a 1000 worshipping each week. But more important than those numbers are God's bottom-line. 100's of people came into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and were sent out in all kinds of ways to proclaim the good news of Jesus to a broken world. How many of you count ZPC as the setting where you got your spiritual start? How many of you felt like you really got started in using your gifts to serve the Lord while here at ZPC?

In some ways the past several years have felt like a wilderness season, a desert experience for many of you. We now have about 1300 members and an average of 450 people in worship. It's been a tough few years, but I believe with all of my heart a new day of great hope and potential is close at hand.

In Joshua 3, the children of Israel have come to a crucial moment in their history- the day of crossing the Jordan River. As we think about beginning the search for a new pastor to serve alongside of you, helping to lead you into this future, in some ways it's like the Jordan River.

When Israel prepared to cross over the Jordan River, they found that it was in flood stage as the snow from the mountains of Lebanon had melted. Normally it was not much larger than Eagle Creek, but in April and May, the time of the Spring harvest, it was a raging torrent of water. They had no boats or rafts. Passage was impossible. Could it be that God had chosen that exact time, so that the people would completely trust Him for the seemingly impossible?

Maybe so it is with us as we think about crossing over into our future. There are factors which are very imposing. There are some divisions which run deep over a few issues like our denominational affiliation. How can we begin a search in such an uncertain time we might ask? Could it be that God is preparing the right person to be your next pastor and God wants you to depend completely on Him to bring about this crucial juncture in your history?

With all of this as a foundation, let's turn to Joshua 3:1-13, which I will read for us.

### **IN ISRAEL'S JOURNEY OF FAITH, THE DAY TO CROSSOVER HAD ARRIVED.**

As the people looked to the west side of the swollen river, only Joshua and Caleb and the two other unnamed spies had been on the other side. There was a great unknown and uncertainty. 40 years ago 10 spies said that there were giants on the other side and they could never defeat them. Caleb and Joshua gave the minority report and said with God's help, it was possible. At the end of chapter 2 the two spies who had gone to Jericho shared Rahab's news that the Canaanites were afraid and believed that Israel's Lord had given them the land.

The day to cross over had arrived. In Hebrew, the word for "cross over" is *abar*. It has the idea of crossing over a boundary. In physical terms, it was like crossing or passing over a river valley like the Jordan. In political terms, it was crossing over a national border. In moral/ethical terms it was like entering into a covenant or transgressing a commandment. It was a different word than the one used at the Red Sea. *Abar* is used no less than 21 times in 3:1-5:1.

On Friday mornings, I mentor a pastor who has his PhD. in Old Testament. I asked him about the Hebrew word, *abar*. His eyes lit up and he quickly said that he had spent time in his doctoral thesis dealing with *abar*. In addition to the definitions and examples I had given above, he said that it meant

doing something decisive which can't be undone. Furthermore, he said, one cannot cross over partially. He said, it's like being "a little bit pregnant." Either you are or aren't; there is really no in between.

Retired pastor John Huffman writes about the land into which they would cross over:

"The land of Canaan was not an earthly paradise or a transcendent existence in which there would be no problems but a place where the whole nature of what it was to be God's people would have to be worked out. There would be the pain of failure and the joy of success. Canaan represented a great improvement over the past four years; but it was not a utopia."

As individuals, we face many *abar*, "crossover" moments in our lives when we take decisive actions which propel us in the unknown of the future. Choosing a college and then a career is a crossover moment. Choosing a person with whom to share our lives is a crossover.

Having a child certainly is a crossover moment. We are going through this adventure with my daughter and son-in-law. Becky was 37 and Austin was 41 when Dulaney was born last April. Both of them were very staid in their ways and in their life together. The crossover of becoming parents has brought them the greatest sense of responsibility they have ever encountered as well as the deepest joy and highest level of frustration.

Alice has said to Becky through the years, "When you have a child, I hope she is just like you." By that she was talking about her being bright, analytical, and fun-loving as well as stubborn. There is no question that Dulaney has fulfilled Alice's wish. Becky is learning a lot about herself in all kinds of ways. At Dulaney's birth Becky and Austin experienced a crossover moment. Life will never be the same again.

There are all kinds of other cross over moments for us as individuals. It may be a divorce, a financial failure or anything that radically changes your life. It may be an artificial time. I have a pastor friend who is celebrating the 49<sup>th</sup> birthday of his wife. Somehow she is dreading 50<sup>th</sup> which feels like a crossover moment to her. Entering into retirement at a certain age can be an artificial crossover time.

Sometimes crossover moments come from an accident or a diagnosed disease. Back in 1993, when Alice heard the diagnosis of breast cancer, we experienced a crossover moment. Even though God was wonderfully good and Alice is still in remission, life would never be the same again.

Another crossover moment comes when we make the spiritual decision to open ourselves to Jesus Christ and with repentance we receive forgiveness and new life as we become His disciple or follower. It's the most important crossover moment of my life. Along the same lines, some of you have had crossover moments on Great Banquets or other spiritual experiences in which you have come home after wandering or have in some important way recommitted your life to Christ.

If you have never opened yourself to the love and grace of God, right now, today, can be a crossover moment for you. If you have been on a journey leading you away from God, this can be a crossover moment for you as you come home to the Loving Father who eagerly awaits your return.

The final crossover moment for us in this life is death. When we are people of faith in Jesus Christ, it is not the end but a glorious new beginning. It's a commencement exercise ushering us into a glorious new eternal presence with God.

There also are the kinds of community crossovers I referred to earlier. That's certainly what is happening in Joshua 3 beside the swollen Jordan River.

### **JOSHUA GIVES THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL THREE SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS AS THEY PREPARE FOR THEIR DAY TO CROSSOVER.**

**First, they are to seek and follow the Lord.** In the wilderness, God had led them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Now God's presence was symbolized and they would be guided by the Ark of the Covenant which would be carried by the priests. In verses 3-4, Joshua orders the people:

"When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests, who are the 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."

This was uncharted territory for Israel and they needed to be watchful for the Lord's guidance as they prepared to crossover.

Dear friends, as you prepare to crossover into a new chapter of ZPC's history, you are moving into a place where you haven't gone before as you search for a new pastor and seek wisdom in discerning your denominational affiliation. It is crucial to seek and follow the Lord, just as Joshua commanded Israel to do.

The session is asking us to seek and follow the Lord during this season of Advent and Christmas as we move into the new year. Other than sending the congregational nominating committee names of people who might serve on the Pastoral Nominating Committee, we need to focus our attention on the Lord who sent His Son to our earth to be with us and guide us in all situations. Please dig into the Bible in a concentrated way, seeking the Lord. Please seek the Lord in concentrated prayer about this crossover moment in which we find ourselves.

In so doing, let's set aside issues which distract and divide us. Right now, we must spend our time seeking the Lord as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus instead of discussing those issues about which we might differ. The challenge of the unknown in these uncertain times is imposing. Like Israel, we can't crossover with our own prowess and abilities. This may be a tough thing for us to swallow as a group of well-educated achievers who consciously or subconsciously think we have all the answers and if we put our minds to it, can accomplish anything.

**Secondly, Joshua calls the people to consecrate themselves.** Listen to verse 5 again:

Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you."

For the Israelites that day beside the Jordan, that meant washing themselves with water and practicing the ceremonial rites which caused them to confess their sins before God and others. For us, it means repenting of anything which we know is sinful in our lives and coming clean with God and

others. If Israel was going to experience God's power and see His plan unfold, they must not be carrying around the baggage of their sinful ways which would weigh them down and hold them back. So it is with us.

As I think of Joshua's first two instructions in the *abar*, crossover moment, my mind goes to Hebrews 12:1-2:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...."

**Thirdly, Joshua instructs the people to follow courageous leadership.** That first meant following the priests as they carried the Ark of the Covenant into the waters. It next meant, following the 12 men, one sent from each of the 12 tribes. These 12 men would follow the priests into the Jordan. These 12 men also would build there on the floor of the Jordan River bed a monument made up of 12 stones. As the people walked by on dry ground, they would be reminded of the fact that all which was happening was God's doing. As they exited the river bed, they were to take 12 stones with which they would build another monument at Gilgal where they would camp that first night in the Promised Land. That monument was to be a teaching tool for them to tell all who followed after what God had done on their day of crossover.

I believe God is calling us to do the same thing as we follow the leaders whom we believe God has called to courageously go before us in deliberating and making decisions which are brought to you. Far too often, we are critical, believing that we know more or could do better.

## APPLICATION

Can you even begin to imagine what it must have been like when at God's time, the *abar*, crossover moment finally arrived? The priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant stepped out first, followed by the 12 men from each of the tribes. When the priest's feet touched the water, the flooded waters of the Jordan River stopped flowing, piling up in a great heap a great distance away. The priests moved to the middle of the riverbed where they stood on dry ground. All of the people of Israel passed by them as they crossed over on dry ground.

A monument of 12 stones was built when they camped at Gilgal that evening. We are still talking about it today.

I passionately believe ZPC's day to crossover will soon come. I can picture it as a day when a new pastor is ministering alongside of you, leading the way. It will be a day when there is a new sense of a community of care for all ages here in this place. At the very heart of all new day will be energized study and joyful worship. The most natural response will be hands-on mission, propelling you out into the world to joyfully proclaim the good news about Jesus and meet the deepest needs of all kinds of people.

In practice, you will be a people called by God to make disciples and release them for service in our broken world. While the empty chairs here will be full at several services and projected budgets exceeded, those factors will pale in importance as you see hundreds of people becoming disciples of

Jesus who are then released for service in our broken world. It will be a glorious time, when you tell all who will listen about that day of crossover that you experienced at a time of uncertainty and change.

Let me close with the words of a verse from William Williams stirring hymn, "Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah," one of my all-time favorites:

"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."