

### **Old Testament Lesson—Joshua 3:7-4:7**

*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. 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." Joshua then said to the Israelites, "Draw near and hear the words of the Lord your God." 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: the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan. So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. 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." 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. 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, 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. 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. When the entire nation had finished crossing over the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua: "Select twelve men from the people, one from each tribe, and command them, "Take twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet stood, carry them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you camp tonight." Then Joshua summoned the twelve men from the Israelites, whom he had appointed, one from each tribe. Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, one for each of the tribes of the Israelites, so that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, "What do those stones mean to you?" then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off in front of the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the Israelites a memorial forever."*

### **New Testament Lesson—Romans 6:3-11**

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

Upon further reflection, I think my sermon title this morning might need some tweaking. It's a bit too late for that, I guess, but...I do think the question's a bit misleading...

"Are you ready to cross over?" Are you ready to cross over?

It's misleading in a couple of ways (as I've been thinking about it this past week). And I'll get to that in a moment.

But first, I want to lay down some context—a look at where we’ve been and where we might be going...

This is either the eleventh or twelfth week in our Confirmation sermon series. We’ve been building and building up to this particular Sunday for months. Our church family has experienced Confirmation together through worship. We’ve made it through all the lessons. We’ve completed the curriculum; and today we will be “confirmed.”

Now, technically, that’s not true. It’s more accurate to say we’ll be rededicating ourselves to the Way of Christ. It’s even more precise to say we’re providing a means to renew the vows made at our baptism.

Personally, I find it helpful to be reminded (every so often) of what I’ve promised to do. It gives me an opportunity to reexamine what’s most important to God and to myself. Are my priorities aligned with those of my Creator?

Plus, who doesn’t love a good vow renewal ceremony? I mean, no one ever came away from a vow renewal feeling less positive about the world...

By the way, I’m sure some of you’ve already made the connection between today’s sermon title and the Scripture lesson—between that “misleading” question and the story of God’s people beginning a new chapter on the other side of the Jordan River.

And, in many ways, this church can choose to start a new chapter this morning. We can take the first step on a journey of recommitment—of saying “Yes” to God’s call—of responding, “Here I am, Lord” when the opportunity to serve comes along. And it *will* come along.

Siblings in Christ: We can choose to do better! We can stop following Jesus at a comfortable, anonymous distance and, instead, put ourselves in a position to do something meaningful—to ready our spirits to effect positive change—to become instruments of peace.

The truth as I see it is this...the closer we are to Christ—the closer we are to his decisive stride and leading, the more clearly we can see the way forward. As we approach Jesus, God’s will becomes more apparent to us. And that empowers us to act with confidence.

I can only speak for myself, of course. But, it does feel like the Church of the twenty-first century has reached a crossroads in many ways. Or, to put it another way: It feels like we’ve arrived at a riverbank.

We know where we need to go. There it is—within our sights! But, in order to get there, we’ve got to cross. We’ve got to take that first step. We can’t see exactly how deep the waters run. We’ll need to be bold and courageous. And yet, we’ve come this far by faith, haven’t we?

Yes, my friends, I believe God’s Holy Spirit is calling us to make a choice during these extraordinary times. Here we are, at that crossroads. Here we are, at the edge of the River Jordan. What will we do? Hmm?

Will we stay here and keep our lights hidden under a basket? Will we languish on the side we know, where it’s familiar? Like the people entrusted to Joshua’s care, will we long for the days of old—the days under tyranny in Egypt?

Things may not have been perfect back then—far from it, actually. But, at least we knew what to expect. We knew not to let our hopes get too high.

During the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. King had a way of speaking to the gravity of stepping up and stepping out in faith. He called it the “fierce urgency of now.” Are we not in another inflection point in our nation’s history? Are we not living in the fierce urgency of now?

I think we are. And if I’m right, then we cannot remain immobilized. We can’t ignore our callings. We can’t keep our talents and God-given power on the sidelines. For God’s sake, just look at the world around us!

Even a passing a glance at the news might cause any reasonable person to ask, “Where’s the Church in all this madness? Does the Church still have a voice today? Are we still relevant? Are we still following Jesus or someone else entirely?”

I have to admit—In my most cynical moments, I find myself asking questions like that. It’s not a place I recommend dwelling for very long...

And yet, I think there’s a big difference between voicing lament and letting our cynicism run wild. From where I’m standing, lament is more than appropriate. In fact, Scripture gives us a lot of room for lament. Just take a look at the psalms, for example.

You see: Cynicism is a lie. It isn’t realistic because it removes our agency. It takes away our capacity to act. It looks at all that’s wrong around us and tries to convince us that our hands are tied—that our feet are in chains. But that isn’t true.

Lament, however, is honest about everything that’s broken in the world...but, rather than taking away our agency and leaving us empty, lament helps us recall God’s faithfulness in the past—helps remind us that our hands and feet are far from tied—no, these are the hands and feet of Christ in the world. And the hands and feet of Christ have power to repair what’s broken!

We, through Christ, have what’s required to fix and to heal and plant and to reconcile! We’ve got what need be the beloved community and to build up the peaceable kingdom.

So...Are you ready to cross over? Are you?

As I said earlier, I think the question’s misleading in a couple of ways. First off, no one crosses the river alone. We do so together—as a people—as a community. So let me ask again: Are *we* ready to cross over? Are *we*?

Secondly...I’m not sure if any of us are ever ready—not really—not fully—not completely. I’m not a parent, but I’ve heard similar sentiments about becoming one—that no one’s one hundred percent ready to be a parent. You just have to step into the waters of parenthood and trust that you’ll make it.

Maybe it’s like that with a lot of life’s twists and turns. Are you ready for college? Are you ready for Tommy’s first day of kindergarten? Are you ready to start your new job? Are you ready to move? Are you ready for that first meeting in recovery? Are you ready to retire? Are you ready to know the test results?

Friends: When we rededicate ourselves to the way of Christ—when we choose to be “confirmed” today—when we cross the Jordan River, we’ll do so together. We’ll do so with a mutual promise to support one another, and to ready each other for the journey ahead. Come what may!

We won’t leave the past completely behind. We couldn’t if we tried. And, what’s more, we shouldn’t. Our history is important. The past is important. Joshua knows that. It’s why he asks the leaders to take twelve stones to remind them not only of the horrors of slavery, but of God’s liberation.

So it’s time to make a choice. Will we meet the moment? Will we follow our Lord into the Jordan and across it? Will we live into the fierce urgency of now? Will we reject the lie of cynicism and take up our cross? Will we make use of our power and gifts?

Because now is the time. Now is the time. Are we ready to cross over? Are we ready? Are we?

Amen.