

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: In the Jordan

Lesson: Joshua 3:7-17

⁷ 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. ⁸ 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.'" ⁹ Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. ¹² Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹³ 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." ¹⁴ So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. ¹⁵ 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, ¹⁶ 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 (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

On Tuesday, we saw kids in Halloween costumes in our neighborhood. We put chocolates on the porch with the lights on. We were curious if kids would come to our home. But as they passed by, they noticed the porch light and chocolates, and some of them came over, took chocolates, and we said hello to them.

My son wanted to do the same as other kids, going from house to house for chocolates and candies. So, we walked around the neighborhood, knocked on doors, and said 'Trick or Treat!' We all had a great time, and my son was especially excited.

I looked up the origins of Halloween recently. It was a celebration of the Celtic people in ancient Britain and Ireland. They considered November 1st as the start of the new year, the beginning of the dark and cold winter. I'm not sure if we should call this time in Wisconsin late autumn or early winter, but today, daylight saving time ended. That meant we got an extra hour of sleep this morning.

When daylight saving time ends and winter begins, we have less daylight and longer nights. Some people look forward to winter for activities like skiing, skateboarding, tubing, jet skiing, or holidays. But for others, winter can be a worrisome time. In fact, we often hear more about strokes and injuries during winter compared to other seasons. So, for many, winter can be a challenging and concerning time due to the cold and long nights.

Just as we experience worry and concerns, the Israelites also always faced worries and problems of life. The Israelites followed Moses, crossed the Red Sea, and entered the harsh wilderness after leaving Egypt. They complained a lot as they faced the challenges of the wilderness. But every time they complained, God provided them with food, water, and shelter through Moses. They journeyed with Moses through the wilderness for 40 years. Before reaching the Promised Land, Canaan, Moses died, and Joshua became the new leader.

After Moses died, the Israelites were unsure of what to do. Some were okay with Joshua as the new leader, but others missed Moses and didn't want to follow Joshua. You might know that even though they saw God's power through Moses, they still complain and question God's plan when things got tough.

Joshua was the new leader, younger and less experienced than Moses. This made some of the Israelites less sure about him. Joshua had two main tasks to resolve: to become the true leader of the Israelites and to safely lead them to the land of Canaan.

However, before they could enter the Promised Land, there was one big problem they had to overcome: the Jordan River.

They were trying to cross the Jordan River during the harvest season, and during this time, the Jordan River always flooded. When the harvest season came, the melting snow from the surrounding mountains would flow into the river, causing it to become deeper and linger for a while.

The Jordan River was a big problem for Joshua and the Israelites. They were almost done with their 40-year journey in the wilderness and were about to enter the Promised Land. But, the deep Jordan River was blocking their way. They could see the Promised Land on the other side, but not being able to cross it made them very sad. People who didn't trust Joshua might have asked him to fix this issue if he was really chosen by God as their leader.

However, Joshua had only one thing to do, apart from that, he had nothing. That one thing was to trust in God. When he prayed to God, God assured him that He would be with Joshua, just as He had been with Moses. And through Joshua, God commanded

the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant, saying, 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.'

God's words surprised everyone. The Israelites who heard God's words through Joshua must have been very surprised. They couldn't even imagine crossing the flooded Jordan River. But God said to them, 'Go and stand in the river.'

As the Israelites listened to God's command and the twelve priests with the Ark of the Covenant went and stood in the Jordan River, the water that was flowing from the mountains began to stop, and the Jordan River slowly started to become dry.

Friends, just like God had parted the Red Sea to lead the Israelites from Egypt to the wilderness, now He is making the Jordan River dry so that the Israelites can enter the Promised Land. The same God who was with Moses is also with Joshua.

Before entering the wilderness, the Red Sea was a major problem for the Israelites, and before entering the Promised Land, the Jordan River was a big challenge. However, with God by their side, the Red Sea parted, and the Jordan River dried up.

But there was a crucial difference when the Israelites crossed the Jordan River with Joshua compared to when Moses parted the Red Sea. Before parting the Red Sea, God told the Israelites, 'The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still' (Exodus 14:14). Then God called Moses and instructed him to raise his staff and stretch out his hand over the sea, and the Red Sea parted.

Back in Moses' time, God told the Israelites to be still because Moses was the only one who truly believed in God at that point. So, God worked through Moses, and the Israelites entered the wilderness, and they spent 40 years learning to trust God. Over time, they changed through God's training.

So, in Joshua's time, God called not only Joshua but also the twelve priests. God told them to carry the Ark of the Covenant and go and stand in the Jordan. When they obeyed God's word and went and stand in the Jordan, it became dry.

This raises one question about our journey of faith: Where are you in your journey of faith? When you face difficulties, when hardships like the Jordan River block your way, how do you respond? If some of you are here but haven't yet experienced God's grace pouring into your life, if you haven't met the living God in your life, if you've never felt touched when reading God's living word, you're like those standing in front of the Red Sea. Those standing in front of the Red Sea can simply stand still, cry out 'God, help us,' and wait for God's grace. Then, God will shower His grace upon you.

However, if among you, there are those who have already experienced God's grace, understand that grace, and have experienced how God fed you, clothed you, and sustained you in the wilderness, and if you have gradually learned how to live through God's living word, then you are like those standing in front of the Jordan River. Now, you should read and follow God's word to go and stand in the river.

God is calling us all to come before Him. And He has given us the Bible. But many people tend to not use the power of the living God in the Bible when they face life's challenges, such as the Jordan River. More specifically, they don't know how to use God's word in the face of life's problems because they have never experienced the power of God's word.

However, I hope and pray that you will trust the story of the Israelites who entered the Jordan River by trusting God's word and trust God. When you stand outside the Jordan River, God doesn't work with His power. Only when we trust God's word and go and stand in the Jordan River, God shows His power to us.

When life's difficulties come to us, when life's challenges come to us, when life's hardships come to us, I hope you don't run away from them. Instead, trust God and trust His living word as you go and stand in the midst of those problems. The more we run from life's problems, the bigger they become, and the more we worry, the deeper they get.

Going and standing into the Jordan River means facing our life's problems and embracing them. It means embracing hardships. By accepting life's hardships, we experience the God who is with us in those difficulties, the God who continually provides us with strength and courage, the grace, and love of God. When we trust in God and go and stand in the Jordan, the river parts.

Friends, I encourage you to trust that you are people of the Word. Trust that God is with you.

As the days grow colder and the nights longer during this season when worries and concerns can easily grip us, I encourage you to trust in God's Word and go and stand in the Jordan River of your life. We are already people who have crossed the Red Sea. God has guided and led us so far. Trust in God and His Word as you stand in the Jordan River to experience God's power.

When we go and stand in the Jordan River, God will watch over us. When we go and stand in the midst of life's hardships, God will rescue us. When we face life's difficulties, trust in God and go and stand. God is with us and will protect us. Amen.