

Get Your Feet Wet  
A Sermon for November 5, 2017  
Joshua 3:7-17  
Lansdowne UMC

I'd like to speak this morning from the title: Get your feet wet

Last week we spoke about Joshua, and how one thing that set him apart for leadership of the people of Israel was that he was filled with the spirit of wisdom. Wisdom was a primary trait that was going to enable him to lead the people out of the wilderness where they had been wandering for 40 years and into the promised land.

So in today's passage, Joshua has led the Israelites to the threshold of the land that God promised to give to Abraham and to his descendants--to the Jordan river. The Jordan is the most substantial river in this area of the world. It averages 100 feet across. In normal times, it's anywhere from 2 to 10 feet deep, but it's waters move quickly. Because of this, crossing the Jordan was a common concern in ancient times, and so it served as a natural boundary for the land. And just as an aside for this All Saints Sunday, because the Jordan is a boundary to the promised land, people frequently allude to crossing the Jordan as a way to talk about someone who has gone on to be with the Lord-- someone who has entered into the spiritual promised land.

So naturally as Joshua approaches the Jordan, there would be a concern about how the company would cross. According to Numbers chapter 26, there were more than 600,000 adult male Israelites. With women and children, we're certainly talking more than a million people who are

envisioned here as needing the cross the Jordan. Adding to the difficulty of the task, the river was apparently in flood stage.

But God speaks to Joshua and says in verse 8, “Give this order to the priests who carry the Ark of the Covenant: When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you are to take your stand in the river.” Then God tells the people through Joshua, “By *this* you will know that the living God is among you and will [defeat your enemies]: the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of all the earth is to cross the Jordan [before you]... [and then at verse 13] When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD... rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters ... shall be cut off; they shall stand in a single heap

God says ‘as soon as the priests carrying the ark set foot in the Jordan, the waters will be cut off.’

Imagine yourself as a priest carrying the ark. Joshua’s got one or two million people rallied up to cross over the Jordan. Wouldn’t it be nice if God would cut off the waters of the Jordan *before* you set foot in the river? Plus, you’ve been waiting 40 years to get to this land. Can’t we at least wait until the water isn’t at *flood stage*. And think of all those people watching. You’ve got yourself a nice respectable position as a priest, but what are the people going to think when they see this? You’ve never mentioned it to anyone, but you’ve always thought that your parents stories of Moses parting the Red Sea had likely gotten a bit... well... exaggerated. But Joshua is the leader that Moses appointed, and you want to be obedient. So out of more obedience than faith, you say, “Ok, I’ll get my feet wet” and we’ll see if God shows up and does something. So you step in the river. You get your foot wet.

That outlook is one possibility. And it's my own personal experience that God will frequently use acts of obedience to bring faith. But there is another possibility. Imagine yourself, again, as a priest carrying the ark. You are absolutely confident that you have no ability whatsoever to stop the flow of the river Jordan. You don't have to try it out to determine if that's true or not. It's just a fact. But here's the thing, you're carrying the presence of God. When you touch the water, the presence of God touches the water. And so you believe with all your heart that the second your heel hits that water, the water is going to flee in obedience to its maker.

But God lets you take the first step. God doesn't force you to get your feet wet. Sure, God could have stopped the river without the priests setting foot in the water. But God chooses to use human means to build faith and to draw us into relationship. God chooses to take human steps of obedience and faith and bless them.

By the priests putting their feet in the water, they demonstrate their own insufficiency, at the same time that they demonstrate God's might. If the priests were not carrying the presence of God, you'd just end up with some cranky old men with wet feet. Getting your feet wet is a step of humility. It's a step that says, God, I can't produced these results on my own, but I'm willing to get uncomfortable so that your power will be known.

So this morning I just want to encourage you in this: Get your feet wet.

In our personal walks with God-- we want to know that God is faithful *before* we put our trust in God. We want to know that God's promises are true before we have to rely on them. But very frequently, that is just not the way that it works. More often we sense God pulling us some way, then we act on God in obedience and hopefully in faith, and *then* we see that God is faithful.

There's this verse from the book of Malachi-- chapter 3 verse 10. It says, "Bring the whole tithe [that's 10% of the fruit of the harvest] into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. [...And then it says] Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it." The tithe is an example of a costly "getting your feet wet," where God responds to our action in power and with blessing. It's one of those things that doesn't particularly make sense before you do it and see for yourself that God is faithful.

God waits on us to get our feet wet before showing up in power. This insight into how God tends to work goes beyond our personal relationship with God and speaks into our life as a church. According to 1 Chronicles 28:2, the ark of the covenant was God's footstool on earth. God's throne is in heaven, but God's footstool was on earth, particularly in the ark of the covenant. This means that the place where God's presence was most powerfully focused was ark of the covenant. And so as the priests carried the ark into the River, the presence of God is beginning to enter into a new land.

Maybe you're someone who knows that you should be stepping out in faith, but you're just finding it really difficult. Most of the time, it's because we start asking "what ifs"

**What if the presence of God isn't with me?** Well, if that's your concern, you're in good company. Moses was once concerned that the presence of God wouldn't be with him. And so he basically told God, 'Look, I'm not doing this unless your presence goes with us.' It sounds a little obstinate to us, maybe. But there's a deep realism to it. When we face things that we *know* we can't do on our own, we *need* God's presence. This is not just a theoretical need.

But here's some good news of Jesus for you. If you are disciple of Jesus Christ, you're a member of the body of Christ. And if you're in the body of Christ, then you carry the presence of God with you wherever you go. As Paul says to the Corinthian church, "Don't y'all know that y'all are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in y'all?" I bet you didn't realize that Paul was a Southerner. But the point is that as people who live after the resurrection and after Pentecost, we live in the age of the Spirit. Jesus told the woman at the well in John chapter 4 that "the hour is coming when you will worship [God] neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem," and that "true worshipers will worship [God] in spirit and truth." There is no need for the ark of the covenant any longer. There is no need for the Temple of Jerusalem any longer-- where the ark lived. We, the church, are now God's Temple. If we are Christians, we carry God's presence wherever we go. So go ahead: get your feet wet.

Here's another "what if": **what if I'm not the right person?** Well this I know: given the choice between a person with great natural abilities, but

little faith and faithfulness, and someone with little natural abilities, but with great faith and faithfulness, God chooses the faithful every time.

- Abraham was old-- in fact Paul says that his body was as good as dead. And his wife couldn't bear children. And yet God told him that he would become the father of many nations, and that his descendants would be a blessing to the whole earth.
- Moses murdered someone and he couldn't speak well, but God used him to bring the Hebrews out of captivity.
- Rahab the prostitute, who helped Joshua's army spy out Jericho, became an ancestor of Jesus.
- David was the runt of the family, but he defeated the giant Goliath because he believed in the power of God more than he believed the natural ability of his opponent.
- Josiah became king at the age of 8 and led one of the greatest revivals in the history of God's people.
- Paul was a great opponent of the church, but when he became obedient to the word of Christ, God made him into the church's greatest missionary.
- Peter, James, and John, the uneducated fisherman, testifying powerfully to Jesus before high government authorities. James the tax collector.
- Mary Magdalene, who had seven demons, becomes the apostle to the apostles when Jesus sends her from the empty tomb to witness to the resurrection.

“What if you're not the right person?” The bible almost has more doubt in you if you think you *are* the right person. Do you have faith and a willing heart? Go ahead: get your feet wet.

And here's one last "what if": **what if the waters don't part.** What if God doesn't do what we expected and hoped God would do.

In a sense, this is the biggest and most important "what if" of taking any step of faith. Sometimes God give special gifts of faith to people so that they can have an unshakable confidence that God is going to act powerfully. Frequently, though, we don't have that kind of faith. We're left with the question "what if God doesn't do it." I'll tell you something, I want so badly to be doing thing after thing what will make us look like idiots if God doesn't act. The church in America in general is very good at doing only the things where we can, to a large extent, control the outcome of. But that isn't where God's presence is obvious. God's shows up in power when the river is in flood stage and there is no way to cross apart from God's power. When God is the only hope, have faith for a miracle.

But serious, what if God doesn't show up? Here's the good news. The worst case scenario is that you're not worse off than you were before except your feet are wet and maybe you look a little silly. But your feet will dry, and let's be honest-- we probably all look silly more often than we think anyway. And if you look silly stepping out in faith and getting your feet wet, well, at least you'll look silly out of obedience to God.

My brothers and sisters, I've come to believe that we're coming to a Jordan crossing moment as a congregation, and perhaps even as the United Methodist Church. We can't go where we need to go without the power of God. Can there be any doubt that Lansdowne, the community we inhabit as a church, desperately needs to know and experience the presence of God? And yet there is a sort of invisible Jordan river

separating us and so much from carrying the presence of God to the other side. The task of transforming our community for Christ-- of making disciples for the transformation of the world-- is an insurmountable task. We need God to make a way.

But I believe God is speaking to us today. And God is saying that if we carry the presence of God into the places where God is not known, that God will back us up. God will make a way. But we can't stay put. We've got to step out in faith. We've got to get our feet wet. And if that sounds too vague for you, because it is still pretty vague, next Saturday, we're going to be taking some time to vision how God might be leading us to get our feet wet. If you want to be part of that, I encourage you to come out at 9am on the 11th.

But this is the invitation I want to give this morning to each of us as individuals. If you're in a point in your life where you're facing a big obstacle-- whether it's a big transition coming up, or a big question mark over something in your life-- something where you just realize that you are in real need of the power and presence of God, bring that forward as we come up for communion. And if you want, you can come up to the rail after you've received for a time of prayer. Jesus tells us the bread and the wine are his body and blood. So when you come, let Jesus stir your faith so that you'll know that God is with you.