

## ***When the Way Across Is Through the Flood***

Joshua 3:7-17

Georgetown Presbyterian Church

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Most of you know that I am a fan of the Texas Longhorns. You may also know that the archrivals of the Longhorns are the Aggies of Texas A&M. Well, there was a Longhorn standing on the banks of a rapidly-moving river. He noticed an Aggie on the other side. The Longhorn yelled out to the Aggie, "How do I get to the other side of the river?" The Aggie looks to his left as far as his eye could see, then he looked to his right as far as his eye could see, then he looked across at the Longhorn and he answered, "You already are on the other side of the river!"

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The question is a valid one, isn't it? How do you get to the other side? I'm sure the Israelites were asking that question when they arrived at the banks of the Jordan River. There they were, after 40 years in the wilderness, on the brink of entering the Promised Land, and all that lies between them and the Promised Land is the Jordan River. Only the river is swift, and the river is deep, and the river is wide, and it is the rainy season and the river is flooding. The only way across is through the flood. Surely they were wondering how they would get to the other side. Surely they were wondering how they would arrive in the land of promise, when the only way across the river was through the flood.

Do you ever find yourself wondering the same thing? Do you ever find yourself at a point in your life where you wonder how you are going to get to the other side of whatever it is that lies between you and your hope?

More than just an historical event, the story in the book of Joshua also describes an experience so common in our lives that there can hardly be an exception. I'm talking about those times in our lives when we look ahead and we see promise, but there is something between us and the fulfillment of that promise. I'm talking about those times when we realize that between the reality of today and the hope of tomorrow what we see are swift and turbulent currents. I'm talking about those times when we are here, and what we long for is over there, and the only way from here to there is through the flood.

We all face those moments in our lives. It's part of what it means to be human. It's not a question of whether or not we will encounter such moments in our lifetime, because all of us will encounter them. The question, then, is, "How will we deal with those times when we find ourselves at the edge of the river?" What do you do when the only way across is through the flood? Because you see, it's really not an option to go back, nor is it possible to go around. You have to cross over to the other side. To find some helpful and sage advice that will direct us in our own river crossing moments, let's take a look at the choices that were before Israel in their moment at the edge of the Jordan River.

As Israel stood on the edge of the Jordan, I can't help but think that they remembered this wasn't the first time they were on the verge of entering the Promised Land. You see, God had tried to lead them into the

Promised Land forty years earlier, but Israel had refused to enter because they were afraid of the people who occupied the land. And now, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, they face the same decision: will they cross over and take possession of the land inhabited by the Canaanites, the Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites? Or is their God not big enough to go ahead of them and drive out those people? The same people who had inhabited the land forty years earlier were still there; how would the Israelites respond this time?

And I can't help but think that as the Israelites gathered here at the Jordan River, they brought to mind yet another remembrance, a remembrance of another time when they found themselves confronted by an impassible body of water, when the Red Sea was in front of them and the rapidly-approaching army of the Egyptian Pharaoh was chasing them from behind. And maybe, just maybe, they would remember how God delivered them safely across the sea.

And I can't help but think that as the Israelites were on the verge of entering the Promised Land, they would recall that God was with them all those forty years in the wilderness. God had given them their manna, their daily bread, and had provided everything they needed. God had protected them against natural and human enemies. The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle and dwelt among them every time they made camp, and God led them with a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. Every step of the way during their time in the wilderness, God was with them. And so surely they were now more willing to believe Joshua when he said, "By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the [people of the land]..."<sup>1</sup>

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When you come to the edge of the river and you want to be on the other side, but the only way across is through the flood, what thoughts come to your mind? Do you focus on the uncertainties and the fears, or do you focus on the God who is greater than the sum of all your uncertainties and fears? Are you paralyzed at the thought that you might encounter something you can't handle, or are you excited because you know that the God who can handle anything will lead you through as you make your way across? Are you so overwhelmed with "what if" questions that you doubt the likelihood of safely crossing through your trials, or are you confident in God's protection and provision? When you come to the edge of the river, what thoughts come to your mind? What thoughts will influence the decision you make, the decision of whether or not to step out in faith despite the depth and current of whatever your Jordan River is?

Louis Zbinden was the pastor of my growing up years. He was fond of saying that faith is believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse. Faith is believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse. That's what the Israelites did. They looked at the Jordan River, swollen with the spring rains, and they did what most right-thinking people would never have done--they stepped out into the river. And as they did so, the waters were held back. The God who was with them was greater than the swirling floodwaters. Their faith wasn't in their own ability to get across; their faith was in God, that he would get them through.

Faith is believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse.

And so when you come to those river crossing moments in your life, when the way between where you are and where you want to be is filled with swift currents and turbulent times, it is faith that enables you to step into the river and begin to make your way across. It is faith that writes upon your heart that God is the one who calls out to you and says, as he did in the book of Isaiah, "This is what the Lord says, the one who created you,... the one who formed you... 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you..."<sup>2</sup>

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I believe that our nation finds itself today on the edge of the Jordan River. The presidential election is upon us. No matter who wins, I fear that the days and weeks ahead will be turbulent. People on both sides of the aisle are terrified at the prospect that the opposing candidate may win the election. The tension is palpable. One psychologist says this is the most anxious she has seen her patients in 20 years of practice. She notes that right now--with war, an historic election and a looming financial crisis--now is most certainly not a time of calm.<sup>3</sup> In addition to all the anxiety, I'm noticing heightened levels of class tension as well as racial tension, and I'm worried about serious unrest that's simmering just beneath the surface.

And so we find ourselves on the banks of the Jordan, and the only way across is through the flood. The challenge for us is to step out in faith that, no matter how swift the current, God will get us through. It is an opportunity for us to believe now what will only make sense in reverse. No matter the results on Tuesday, the sun will still rise in the east and set in the west; the Bible will still be the word of God; the truth will still be the truth, and God will still be in control. As people of faith we have to believe that God will be the one to get us through, no matter who wins the election. Presidents have come and gone throughout the history of our nation. Some of them have been more competent than others. But through it all, God has been with us.

In just a moment we will sing our closing hymn, Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah. The final verse says this: "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."<sup>4</sup>

What will we do when find ourselves at the edge of the river, and the only way across is through the flood? What is required is not so much a certainty about what lies on the other side of the river. What is required is the knowledge that God will be with you.

It requires believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse.

On the eve of our national elections, do you know God well enough to have that kind of faith, even if your candidate doesn't win?

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua 3:10

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 43:1-2a

<sup>3</sup> "Dems, GOP Agree on Something: Anxiety", msnbc.com, 10/28/08

<sup>4</sup> Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah, Presbyterian Hymnal, 281.