

Why does it feel like so long since I have been here? It does, it feels like forever.

I don't know if you remember, but the last time we were together, we were in Joshua the first few chapters...Guess what?!!! We are still there!

And please let me preface this... the sermon today is long and it might be that it is two sermons so if I stop in the middle I will finish it next week. We'll just see what God wants to do this morning.

Can I just give us a quick overview?

Moses had died. And God had been grooming Joshua to take over. I can't even imagine how Joshua felt. But God had chosen him--- He had chosen these people.

Can I tell you something else? Joshua didn't do everything perfect. He made mistakes. He messed up. But I want you to note, that when he did, he fell on his face before God and made it right.

God knew Joshua. He knew everything about him... He knew his strengths, and He knew his weakness and yet He chose him....God's like that. God knew Israel... He knew their strengths...and He knew their weaknesses and yet He chose them...God is like that.

Don has this jeep...it's really ugly....Seriously, this is an actual picture of Don's jeep.

We were actually going to use this in the parade for the church of the Nazarene's entry...I wanted to put signs all over it. "Christians are like this jeep...not perfect and sometimes not even attractive but bought and paid for! Or "work in progress." Or "being restored" But the truth is, not much is being done on it right now, so it looks bad. Don wouldn't let me use it.

When I see Don's jeep, this is what I see. I don't mind driving it, it has a lot of play in the steering but at least if you are driving, you can get out of the driver's door....You sit in the passenger's seat and it takes everything you have to hold the handle just right and body slam the door just so you can get out of it.... I'm serious ... I'm not impressed.

But you know what Don sees when he looks at this jeep? And again, I'm serious... Don sees this.

One time when Kat was far from God and throwing away her life, God had me draw a picture of her... and give it to her. It was a picture of what she actually looked like...she was drinking and smoking.... Life was a party most of the time she wore an old coat that was ragged and her long hair was messy....I drew that and then I drew a picture of Jesus with brush in hand looking at her and painting her portrait...and the painting was of Kathy as a beautiful bride.

God sees us as we are-- yes, but He sees deeper into what we can be.

But you know what? Unless Don starts to put some work toward that jeep and starts to restore it? It's only gonna get worse. It can't just stay like that. Neither can we....we can't just do our own thing and say oh God will forgive me... Do you know that God came to **redeem** us from our sin... not to justify it or condone it but to change us. If Don were to take that jeep in and just paint over all that rust and the broken places...it would still be a piece of junk...God doesn't just patch over our sin...He's at work in our lives...We are called God's masterpieces....not because we are something but because He is creating something beautiful in us.

When God set Joshua over the people of Israel, it wasn't because he was something... It was because Joshua was moldable. God's instructions to Joshua were **B e** strong and courageous....not because Joshua had it all together, but because he would need that encouragement.

Joshua 1:5 No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. ⁶ **Be strong and courageous**, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

⁷ **Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law** my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸ **Keep this Book of the**

Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful **to do** everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.
⁹ Have I not commanded you? **Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.**"

I think Joshua needed this encouragement.. I would have had I followed Moses. And then God has the people "get ready" Joshua told them, "consecrate yourselves." It was a time of physical and spiritual cleansing. Much like when we come to the Communion Table. In First Corinthians 11 Paul tell the Corinthians, "²⁷ So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup." Our lives should be daily taking an inventory---letting God into to all the places of our lives and us in turn following wholeheartedly.

We will be taking communion next Sunday...Can I challenge you to 'consecrate yourselves" because I believe God wants to do amazing things among us.

Let's read starting with the 3rd chapter and let me just say that I am doing more reading than I normally would but I want you to see how this story is told and retold because it's important.

Joshua 3:1 Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. ² After three

days the officers went throughout the camp, ³ giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. ⁴ Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. I love that... I'm tired of going through the motions...No Change...falling into the same ruts.... I want to follow God into new territory. But keep a distance of about two thousand cubits^[a] between you and the ark; do not go near it."Do you know that is just over 1/2 mile?!! God is holy..we have lost that...

⁵ Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."

⁶ Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people." So they took it up and went ahead of them.

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.

4 When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, ² “Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, ³ and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.”

⁴ So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, ⁵ and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, ⁶ to serve as a sign among

you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' ⁷ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."

⁸ So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the LORD had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down.

⁹ Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been^[a] in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day.

¹⁰ Now the priests who carried the ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything the LORD had commanded Joshua was done by the people, just as Moses had directed Joshua. The people hurried over, ¹¹ and as soon as all of them had crossed, the ark of the LORD and the priests came to the other side while the people watched. ¹² The men of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over, ready for battle, in front of the Israelites, as Moses had directed them. ¹³ About forty thousand armed for battle crossed over before the LORD to the plains of Jericho for war.

¹⁴ That day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him all the days of his life, just as they had stood in awe of Moses.

¹⁵ Then the LORD said to Joshua, ¹⁶ “Command the priests carrying the ark of the covenant law to come up out of the Jordan.”

¹⁷ So Joshua commanded the priests, “Come up out of the Jordan.”

¹⁸ And the priests came up out of the river carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD. No sooner had they set their feet on the dry ground than the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and ran at flood stage as before.

¹⁹ On the tenth day of the first month the people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho. ²⁰ And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. ²¹ He said to the Israelites, “In the future when your descendants ask their parents, ‘What do these stones mean?’ ²² tell them, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’ ²³ For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. ²⁴ He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God.”

This is an incredible story, and it has so much in it, but I want our focus to be about the twelve stones and the twelve men. Craig asked me to speak on why we are bringing stones into the church. And I want to do that.

I want you to take note that **God** instructed Joshua to Choose twelve men to gather these stones and carry them... if it didn't mean anything it wouldn't have mattered who carried the stone but it did so these men were chosen.

When Pastor Carlos was here, he referenced this event and called out 12 leaders from this congregation and asked them to bring a stone. Carlos was referencing 12 people who would by bring their stone, would in essence say. "I believe God... I believe that God has His hand on this church.. I am a part of this church and I want to be on board with what God is doing here. Pastor, I stand with you and behind you..." This stone says that God can count on you. You're committed. You won't bail when things get tough... you'll go the distance . Let me take you to the last chapter in Joshua. This is what we read in verse 31 ³¹ **Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the LORD had done for Israel.** You matter! You might not feel like you qualify or that you have it together, but somehow you feel like God is calling you to bring a stone...You want it known that that you are willing to stand up... to stand with your pastor and this church. Thank you for these stones...

My birthday was this week Thursday. I've made a lot of mistakes in those 59 years. But early Thursday morning I slipped out of bed to have my time with the Lord before anyone else was up. That morning that starts the 60th year of my life, I recommitted my life to Him. I asked his forgiveness for the past and for sins I have committed--- I told Him that I want to be in the very center of His will

NO MATTER what that looks like. Right now there are people in our community who don't like me...that bothers me, but I was praying about some things that I knew were wounding God's heart and I prayed for an opportunity to say something and I did and it wasn't well received. My nature is to go and smooth everything over but I can't because sometimes we have to stand up and be different..to hold up a measuring stick. I want to follow God more than I want man's approval...and let me tell you, that's a flaw in me! I really like people to like me....but I want God's approval more than that. The morning of my birthday, that's the commitment I made to Him. I want to love HIM more.... I failed Him in that area and I don't want to do that anymore...I want to hold tightly to HIM and hold loosely to other things. Honestly people, I don't know what that looks like. I have to tell you that one of the things I have held tightly to is this church. I could stay here forever. I love Viborg, I love this church! I love you. The day of the parade, several of you were on the front lawn and as I walked in the church to do something, I was overwhelmed with how much I love my people and this place, this church. I've made some mistakes here... This was my first church. And I don't know if like Moses God will say.... You can go this far and no farther or if I am to be like Joshua and be the one to take us in to the places where I believe in my spirit God has promised me for this church. And guess what... It doesn't matter...God will be God in this place. Do you know that Moses was a great leader, but the Word of God tells us that the Lord exalted Joshua as he had Moses...My eyes can't be on the position but on God and I believe that is why God is calling out leaders in this place... Leaders that will follow him with undivided hearts.

I love what the people told Joshua in chapter one: Joshua 1:16 Then they answered Joshua, "Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. ¹⁷ Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses.... Only be strong and courageous!"

In other words, we are going to follow you as long as you follow God...we have your back...just be strong and courageous.

God called out leaders but the stone also represented remembrance.

Remember God...remember what God has done.

In reading the text, I was a little confused as to where those stones ended up..were they in the middle of the river where the priests had stood or were they taken to Gilgal and so I went to the commentaries and I love what I found. Most likely there wasn't just one heap of stone but at least two. And most likely more....places of remembrances. "do this in remembrance....when your children ask....How like God. I lived in Florida and something happened that I had to leave under hard circumstances... I didn't want to leave.. I had my church and my friends but I had to go..... I only could pack my car so I had to choose what I could take and what I would have to leave behind and as I was packing I picked up a candy dish that looked like a stone and as I stood there with tears running down my cheeks I felt the Holy Spirit whisper to me, " Take it. Take it as a reminder that I will never leave you and I am your solid rock." He has been that and more to me...

Even when I look like that old jeep. He's still scraping and polishing and taking some things off and putting new places in me. Places that look more like Him. Making me a new creation..

I think that is what He is doing here.... I think like He says in His word, I am doing a new thing.

Can I take you one other place in scripture? I Peter 2

¹³ Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

¹⁷ Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.....²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. ² Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴ As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.”

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Once you were an old broken down jeep....not much good. But in the master’s hands you who were nothing has become valuable again..... Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God

Flawless –Mercy Me

