

## Risk Taking Faith from a Place of Promise and Presence

*Joshua 3: 5-1; 1 Thess 3: 5-13; Matt 23: 1-12 (37-39).*

Today we will look mainly at the OT reading, Joshua.

This is an exciting part of the Bible and there are parallels for us as we move into a new exciting phase of being the people of God in this district.

The Israelites, the people of God, are moving forward at last – after 40 years. There will be no more going in circles wondering why things don't work, no more just waiting and waiting. This is **it!**

And here today we see how the 'it' is to start.

Firstly God lets Joshua know that He will make that clear to all of Israel that He is with Joshua just as He was with Moses. The people of God had learnt through all the years in the desert that it was important to have a leader that hosted the presence of God, who met with God face to face.

So the first thing mentioned here is God's affirmation of the leader God has chosen for this next season. Then the leader, Joshua, is to tell the people what to do. And the first thing is to tell the priests that they are to go and carry the Ark of the Covenant to the water's edge and then to stand in the water – which we are reminded in v 15 is in flood at that time of the year. God loves doing the impossible!

The Ark of the Covenant is a reminder of God's presence being with them and of the Covenant God has made with them back at Sinai. They are His people and He is their God. Their identity is in being His people not in being slaves, or ex-slaves, or refugees wandering about looking for a homeland. With the Covenant and their history they know they are a people of promise. And with the priests carrying the Ark ahead to enter the Promised Land they are going forth declaring promise and presence.

Promise and presence.

Step one in going forth with God – remembering His promises and going in, and with, His presence.

God had taught them in the 40 years to wait for His presence to move before they moved.

In those 40 years they had learnt deep lessons about obedience and that being God's people meant following God's instructions, including instructions

on how to live in ways that pleased Him. They were a covenant people with the only ever two-way agreement with a deity. But they also had the opportunity to practice that covenant given in the 10 Commandments each day. To live by its codes and to keep a day Holy for the Lord. They learnt that God was their sole provider in places where it was impossible to get food – none were left out in this. But even then they had to learn, thought they didn't do well with this one – they had to learn not to whinge or complain as that made God very angry. For when they complained they couldn't see the blessings they were receiving from God every day.

When tough things happened to them, such as the Amalekites attacking them, they learnt new things. They learnt to hold up their leader's hands as the leader, Moses, lifted up his hands before the throne of God (Ex 17:15-16). And when they did this they won the battle against those attacking.

They learnt to love God with all their hearts, minds, souls and strength.

Yes, the 40 years of waiting had developed love and obedience, faith and trust in the God they followed, making them ready to take the land promised way back in Abraham's time. That is why they are told several times before making this move to cross the Jordan River to *be strong and courageous* (Josh 1:6; 18). And the first step is to have those responsible for the worshipping life of the community take the Ark of the Covenant and stand in the middle of what looks impossible, especially at flood time. They are to take the promises and the presence physically present in the Ark and stand in the river. Then the miraculous and amazing will happen and Joshua reminds them v 10 that this is how they '*will know that the living God is among*' them. This is a reminder again of promise – and that God fulfils promise. In this case it is to drive out the enemies, the Canaanites, Hittite and all the rest.

Promise and presence go with them.

There was another step to this step of obedience that is mentioned in v 12 and more details are given in chap 4:2-7 where each tribe is included in the miracle that happens. 12 men, one from each tribe take up a stone and when the water stops flowing they put the stones across the riverbed as a sign to tell the future generations what God has done. In God's family it is always important to tell the future generations about God's love and faithfulness, about how God provides and how God has given us a Covenant that He won't break. For our generations the Covenant is written in the Blood of His Son – so a priceless Covenant. We are to tell every generation, for how do they hear if we do not tell, if we take to the grave the knowledge and relationship we have with God without sharing it?

The parallel I see in the Israelites crossing the Jordan to enter the Promised Land, is in the fact that a week ago our debt was paid off and we are now freer to focus on why we are here as the people of God planted in the two areas we are in, Hall and Nichols and environs, and Charnwood and surrounding suburbs.

After being a parish for something like 40 years a lot has been learnt as a people who love and obey God, as a people formed in trust and faith. As a people who dared, under another leader, to build a church when it had seemed impossible and to work together to achieve it. All the waiting and the active work to build and pay has reached a place where courageous faith and hard work has positioned the church for taking hold of the promises that are part of its future, its reason for being in this district. And like the Israelites we only look backwards to remember God's faithfulness and to tell it to the next generation.

We will shortly have a ceremony with the bishop to consecrate St Barnabas Church – it looks like being in the new year, probably February as there are good order processes that have to happen. But your faith in action has brought us to this day. It is a faith that goes the distance!

Along the way there has been a learning to work together – from both centres. There has been cooperation. A unique parish identity as God's people right here, God's family, has formed over time. There has been a belief in God's purposes for the future of this church. There has been faithful commitment and a willingness to act upon what was believed in faith.

The paying off of the debt for the ministry centre is showing that we are positioning to cross our Jordan River – that will show the next place and way we will walk with Jesus to bring his love and life to the world around us.

Like the Israelites the worship of God is first. This is a prayerful congregation. God is in our midst. And His presence is, for us like the Israelites, is what it is all about.

One of the visions God gave both myself and the bishop and the Parish Council adopted it as part of our parish vision and our parish life, was to start up a House of Prayer. It is a place of adoration of God – to offer worship to God, eventually day and night. It is a place to hold up hands together before the very throne of God, like Moses did. God has chosen this parish as a place to dwell in a way that it has never known before. God has promised to answer the prayers offered in this House of Prayer. This part of our parish life will become a central part. And from that place of God's Presence there will be an Overflow of His love, mercy, healing, reconciliation, and salvation reaching far and wide.

At present the Overflow, our new House of Prayer meets on a Wed night 7-9pm at St Barnabas and all are welcome. It will have two, or three, hour sessions at other times but we, and I, have obeyed God's leading in beginning it and the bishop has commissioned it. You need to know that it is to be a central part of God's new covenant with us. It is a place of promise and presence. It is like placing the Ark of the Covenant in the centre of the stream for our crossing. It is like the Tent of Meeting being the place for the glory of God's presence to be hosted all the time. As part of hosting God it means that the churches are to be places of God's abiding presence and as such we need to be careful of what other activities may seek to happen there.

Once the worship and reminder of the promises and presence are in place, then the tribes, the people of God follow and place stones in the river. This is how we position ourselves to claim the promises and carry the Presence of God with us. It is important that we write up the promises that have been given to this parish since its beginnings. I would like a short booklet of them to be ready for the consecrating. If someone here is able to collect and put together God's promises to this church please let myself and the Council know.

In the next year we will step out and do new things in the communities around us. We may join in helping Neighbourhood Watch with a Boot Sale, we may help the Youth start a Friday night Music Bash outside the Boutique, we may start up a Young Parents and Little Ones music program, we may put on a Christian Festival for the community. Parish Council has begun times of listening to God as to where to put our feet. I invite the whole parish to do that. Some of you have been carrying dreams of what we will do when we crossed the Jordan for a long time. Mary shared with me about wanting to see young people at tables outside the Boutique in the same week that a visiting woman from America with a Prophetic gift said she saw us doing that very thing. I, we, want to hear the dreams and visions, the promises from long ago and from near. We will make some times to wait, listen and share. Please make sure you come along when they are advertised. This represents all the tribes crossing to our future – none to be left back in the wilderness.

And if any think they are too old for the next stage of the journey I remind us that everyone who was alive came with Joshua.

For the older members of our parish there are two things you can do without effort, I hope.

- 1) Uphold your leader's hands in prayer. Pray for Helen and myself in particular every day and especially for the services on the Sunday and the messages we bring to you.

2) Be spiritual parents and grandparents to the younger ones. Share with them, pray for them. Very few young people know God these days and we have the good news.

For all of us:

Robin Bali and Alison Morley, who were with us for the Mission 'For Such a Time as This', have accepted my invitation to come and share with us again. Robin will preach on Nov 13<sup>th</sup> and will just share with us over lunch and an informal discussion. Please be there if you can. They will then come back in the new year and run a workshop about easy ways to share our own faith stories with others. Just hearing the stories of those on the mission this year, and they hearing ours, really encouraged us.

To help us see the importance of sharing our faith with others I read from a biography of someone in the mid 1800's. See if you can guess who the writer is.

*"On one of my recent coach journeys as I gazed from the coach window, I was led into a train of thought concerning the condition of the multitudes around me. They were living carelessly in the most open and shameless rebellion against God, without a thought for their eternal welfare. As I looked out the window I seemed to see them all ... millions of people all around me given up to their drink and their pleasure, their dancing and their music, their business and their anxieties, their politics and their troubles, ignorant – wilfully ignorant in many cases – and in other instances knowing all about the truth and not caring at all. But all of them, the whole mass of them sweeping on and up in their blasphemies and devilries to the Throne of God. While my mind was thus engaged, I had a vision.*

*I saw a dark and stormy ocean. Over it the black clouds hung heavily; through them every now and then vivid lightning flashed and loud thunder rolled, while the winds moaned, and the waves rose and foamed, towered and broke, only to rise and foam, tower and break again.*

*In that ocean I thought I saw myriads of poor human beings plunging and floating, shouting and shrieking, cursing and struggling and drowning; and as they cursed and screamed they rose and shrieked again, and then some sank to rise no more.*

*And I saw out of this dark angry ocean, a mighty rock that rose up with its summit towering high above the black clouds that overhung the stormy sea. And all around the base of this great rock I saw a vast platform. Onto this platform, I saw with delight a number of the poor struggling, drowning wretches continually climbing out of the angry ocean. And I saw that a few of*

*those who were already safe on the platform were helping the poor creatures still in the angry waters to reach a place of safety.*

*On looking more closely I found a number of those who had been rescued industriously working and scheming by ladders, ropes, boats and other means more effective, to deliver the poor strugglers out of the sea. Here and there were some who actually jumped into the water, regardless of the consequences in their passion to 'rescue the perishing'. And I hardly know what gladdened me the most – the sight of the poor drowning people climbing onto the rocks reaching a place of safety, or the devotion and self-sacrifice of those whose whole being was wrapped up in the effort for their deliverance.*

*As I looked on, I saw that the occupants of that platform were quite a mixed company. That is, they were divided into different 'sets' or classes, and they occupied themselves with different pleasures and employments. But only a few of them seemed to make it their business to get the people out of the sea.*

*But what puzzled me most was the fact that though all of them had been rescued at one time or another from the ocean, nearly everyone seemed to have forgotten all about it. Anyway, it seemed the memory of its darkness and danger no longer troubled them at all. And what seemed equally strange and perplexing to me was that these people did not even seem to have any care – that is any agonizing care – about the poor perishing ones who were struggling and drowning right before their very eyes ... many of whom were their own husbands and wives, brothers and sisters and even their own children. ...*

*I have always said that the occupants of this platform were engaged in different pursuits and pastimes. Some of them were absorbed day and night in trading and business in order to make gain, storing up their savings in boxes, safes and the like.*

*Many spent their time in amusing themselves with growing flowers on the side of the rock, others in painting pieces of cloth or in playing music, or in dressing themselves up in different styles and walking about to be admired. Some occupied themselves chiefly in eating and drinking; others were taken up with arguing about the poor drowning creatures that had already been rescued.*

*But the thing to me that seemed the most amazing was that those on the platform to whom He called, who heard His voice and felt that they ought to obey it – at least they said they did – those who confessed to love Him much were in full sympathy with Him in the task He had undertaken – who worshipped Him or who professed to do so – were so taken up with their*

*trades and professions, their money saving and pleasures, their families and circles, their religions and arguments about it, and their preparation for going to the mainland that they did not listen to the cry that came to them for this Wonderful Being who had Himself gone down into the sea. Anyway, if they heard it they did not heed it. They did not care. And so the multitude went on right before them struggling and shrieking and drowning in the darkness.”...*

When referring to those in the sea he says: “*Are all alike in one thing? No, all alike in two things – not only the same in their wickedness but, unless rescued, the same in their sinking, sinking ... down, down, down ... to the same terrible doom. That great sheltering rock represented Calvary, the place where Jesus had died for them. And the people on it were those who had been rescued. The way they used their energies, gifts and time represented the occupations and amusements of those who professed to be saved from sin and hell – followers of the Lord Jesus Christ...”*

There is much more that there isn't time to read to you, and I will ask Katrina to print it off and have it available to those who would like to read it in full.

But one of the concluding paragraphs says: “*Look! Don't be deceived by appearances – men (and women) and things are not what they seem. All who are not on the rock are in the sea! Look at them from the standpoint of the great White Throne, and what a sight you have! Jesus Christ, the Son of God is, through His Spirit, in the midst of this dying multitude, struggling to save them. And He is calling on you to jump into the sea – to go right to His side and help Him in the holy strife. Will you jump? That is, will you go to His feet and place yourself absolutely at His disposal?”*

These words and vision that I've just quoted were written by William Booth the co-founder of the Salvation Army.

For the next phase of our church, now that we are fully & financially established as a Rock of Christ locally, is to save souls and we will do that from a place of promise and presence, from loving and obeying God and walking in faith. The Prayer House will hold up hands before the Lord's throne as we actively go out for the Lord, enabling and prayer covering.

Let's enjoy the adventure and discovering exactly how God wants us to serve, and **save**, with Him, knowing His loving faithfulness and close presence. But also knowing that the 'when' is imminent – we are to cross our Jordan with active, not passive, faith in the One we follow and walk with.

Let us pray: