

“Crossing Over”

Joshua 3:7-17

The LORD said to Joshua, “This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses.

You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, ‘When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.’ ”

Joshua then said to the Israelites, “Draw near and hear the words of the LORD your God.”

Joshua said, “By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan.

So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe.

When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off; they shall stand in a single heap.”

When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people.

Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest.

So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at the city Adam, while those flowing toward the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off.

Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho.

While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.

Crossing Over

Joshua 3:7-17

November 5, 2023

Rev. Michael P. Catanzaro

I.

I got my COVID booster on Monday with no real ill-effect; same with the flu shot a few weeks back. Tuesday, though, I woke up with mild flu-like symptoms; which can happen in some folks. A small price to pay, but by 4 p.m. I was ready to not be doing anything except sitting in my recliner; which I did. Typically, I get home from work at 6:15, which is when Arlo finishes with Tai Chi, and arrive home with much gratitude to find another scrumptious meal on the table. It is unusual, then, for me to be on-hand for the whole meal preparation process; or, more accurately, “on-nose.” Sitting there in my chair, I could smell one delicious aroma after another waft through the house as Linda introduced one ingredient after another into the recipe. Which, on one of the first cold days of the fall, was a real delight I had not anticipated; it took me right back to my grandmother’s kitchen and a simpler time in my life.

II.

Living right in back of her house the next street over, and with both my parents working, my family and I were frequent guests at my grandmother’s house for meals. Expect for Wednesdays when Uncle Bud and his family would eat there, and Fridays which was the day of the week given over to Uncle Jack and his family. Thursday was “Spaghetti Night” and typically all three families attended, with huge meatballs, and pounds of pasta smothered in sauce that she had canned herself through the fall. “Spaghetti Night” was also the *only* occasion during my childhood when our family drank soda (“pop”); for some strange reason, it always root beer with spaghetti.

Adele was very old-school in her cooking: meat, potatoes, and lots of fresh vegetables. Whatever she made, though, you always knew it would be in *ample* amount. A woman with a great and abiding faith, my grandmother was very much the Martha in the kitchen, and understood her ministry to be one of hospitality. Guess this apple did not fall far from that tree.

III.

What made the great regularity with which she rustled up such vast quantities of tasty food most impressive, however, was her kitchen; which, frankly, was no great shakes. Beyond being quite small, you would have thought that all her pots, pans and utensils had been purchased at a garage sale. Old aluminum pots with cracked or missing handles, mismatched lids, thin frying pans to which food was constantly sticking (but never burned), a motley assortment of spoons, spatulas, and mixing bowls.

She did, though, have an incredibly well-seasoned and wonderful cast iron “fry pan” which she used to make *the* most delicious fried potatoes you have *ever* had (the secret to which, I learned later in life, was the whole stick of butter she used). It simply boggles the mind that she was able to cook so much delectable and healthy food, in such vast quantities, for so many years using so very little and, really, not much at all.



IV.

Which brings me to my table-saw; or, more accurately, the lack there of. All through October I have been endeavoring to put a cedar railing on the deck of Linda’s “She Shack.” (See photos.) The job required about 60 individual boards, each one of which had to be dimensioned down from rough cut lumber using my jointer, planer and, of course, the aforementioned table-saw.

Six boards shy of the 60, the motor on the table-saw conked out; which is a *huge* bummer and has left me feeling adrift and helpless in the face of my wood shop needs and aspirations. I figured out how to remove the motor and it has been at Lawton’s Electric for over a week now; I am assuming (that is to say, hoping) for an easy, if not necessarily quick repair.

With my usual mania for a sense of completion, not to mention the winter bearing down, I texted Rich Grayson to book some time on his table saw so that I could rip the remaining six boards. Turns out, Rich and my grandmother have much in common.

V.

If you are unaware, Rich is a terrific woodworker; specializing, uniquely, in steam-bent furniture. If you have never seen his work, take a trip down to Lorna's Lounge and check out the coffee table and side table he made; gorgeous. A trip to his shop, however, was a little bit like looking behind the curtain in the Wizard of Oz; specifically, in regard to his table-saw which, how shall I say this, is a bit *humble*.

Whereas I have *way* more table-saw than I need, a modern Jet brand with a big, heavy, cast iron table and a fancy Incra aluminum fence which cuts everything perfectly every single time with no fuss, Rich's saw has a stamped metal top, and requires some serious attention to detail (as in a tape measure and speed-square) to make sure the cut stays true and, in particular, that boards cut to the same width are, in actuality, the same width. Of course, another difference in our saws, is that his works just fine, while mine does not.

VI.

While I was there ripping the cedar, I commented on his "old school" saw. Rich did some quick math and estimated that he got the saw about 49 years ago. Rich's saw certainly suffices and does the job, but, boy, it sure makes all the furniture he produces all the more impressive. Like my grandmother and her kitchen, which is exactly what I told him. Rich and Adele each produced incredible results with humble tools operating out of a small work space, and did so with consistency and with quality all of their lives.

Turns out Rich and my grandmother have other things in common, as well. Both share a Scottish background, as well as all that often goes with it. When I was relating this same story to the good folks at Partridge Knoll during the service there on Wednesday, Janet Stitt very kindly helped me to settle on a more appropriate word to describe Rich and Adele in place of the one I had used: she suggested, "*frugality*." *The* most important thing they share, though, is the propensity for crossing over.

VII.

Admittedly, our scripture reading from the book of Joshua is a bit of an odd pick for today; if only because of its length given we are also celebrating communion. I decided to stick with it, though, because it is so darn unusual. I have no recollection of *ever* having read, or heard of, this story and was really taken by the symbolic parallelism of one generation *finally* ending a 40 year journey of wandering in the wilderness by crossing over the River Jordan to enter the good and fertile land which had been promised to them much like the preceding generation had begun the journey by crossing through the Red Sea in order to escape Pharaoh's armies and enslavement in Egypt. Not to mention, all of this being done with the great fanfare of ritualized pomp and circumstance such that God would exalt Joshua in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that God will be with Joshua as God was with Moses.

VIII.

Now, I certainly understand the significance of making a big deal out of the fulfillment of God's promise to the people to deliver them to a promised land of their very own as such a homeland lies at the heart of their story as a people; both in those days, and still very much to this day as so vividly and tragically illustrated by recent events. For our purposes this morning, however, I would like us to consider going a different way with today's text.

I know for my own self, I allow too many things to stand in my way of crossing over; and, mostly, these are barriers or impediments that I, myself, create. For instance, sometimes I let the perfect stand in the way of the good, or I put things off waiting for a better time, or I busy myself with other less important matters, or believe I need to be better equipped before taking on a task, or I allow myself to be lulled into waiting for a better pitch before I take a swing.

IX.

Other times, I confess, I get too comfortable with the status quo, no matter how much I would *like* it to change or no matter how much it *needs* to change. Sometimes, I feel as if I've been wandering for so long in the wilderness that it has become second nature, or natural, or that this is the way it is somehow supposed to be, or that it is simply my lot in life.

In short, I too often find reasons, at this time and under these circumstances, to *not* get past whatever obstacle, challenge or new opportunity that is lying there right in front of me at my feet and simply cross over to whatever awaits me on the other side in this very moment, and for all my life. Just think of all the delicious meals my grandmother would not have made, all the incredible furniture Rich would not have produced, if either allowed themselves to be stymied by the kitchen utensils, or tools, they did *not* possess.

X.

No, it is not a matter of frugality, it is a matter of the courage to make due, to seize the moment, to carry on and jump right in regardless of what we do not yet possess, in our kitchen or shop, but also in our heart. It is a matter of having the faith that, like Joshua, God is with us as well. It is a matter of believing in what awaits us on the other side such that we take that first step into the river that stands before us, separating us from what was and is, to what might yet be and has been long promised to us.

Given that today is Pledge Sunday, a lesser preacher would be tempted to draw a comparison to making a pledge to the church as an example of crossing over. Instead, I would like to end today by the church, *this* church, *our* church, making a pledge to *you*. That whatever confronts you in your life, whatever river you must cross over, we will help you do it, and we will be there waiting for you with great fanfare to welcome you home. Amen.