

INI - SDG

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday a. Trinity

July 31, 2011

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Hecla, SD

Series: Joshua 06

Text: Joshua 4 - *And it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over the Jordan, that the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying: 2 "Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from every tribe, 3 "and command them, saying, 'Take for yourselves twelve stones from here, out of the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet stood firm. You shall carry them over with you and leave them in the lodging place where you lodge tonight.' " 4 Then Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the children of Israel, one man from every tribe; 5 and Joshua said to them: "Cross over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and each one of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, 6 "that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, 'What do these stones mean to you?' 7 "Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever." 8 And the children of Israel did so, just as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan, as the LORD had spoken to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and carried them over with them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there. 9 Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood; and they are there to this day. 10 So the priests who bore the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the LORD had commanded Joshua to speak to the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua; and the people hurried and crossed over. 11 Then it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over, that the ark of the LORD and the priests crossed over in the presence of the people. 12 And the men of Reuben, the men of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh crossed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses had spoken to them. 13 About forty thousand prepared for war crossed over before the LORD for battle, to the plains of Jericho. 14 On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they had feared Moses, all the days of his life. 15 Then the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying, 16 "Command the priests who bear the ark of the Testimony to come up from the Jordan." 17 Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, "Come up from the Jordan." 18 And it came to pass, when the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD had come from the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet touched the dry land, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks as before. 19 Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. 20 And those twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal. 21 Then he spoke to the children of Israel, saying: "When your children ask their fathers in time to*

***come, saying, 'What are these stones?' 22 "then you shall let your children know, saying, 'Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land'; 23 "for the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, 24 "that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever."***

Theme: MEMORIAL STONES

- Remind us of the gracious work of God
- Used to teach our children
- Require strong shoulders

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus who have crossed over from death to life in Him, Sometimes I wonder what I would do without lists and a calendar. I have a hard time remembering dates and schedules - even important things! I can easily imagine forgetting some, if I did not write it down. I imagine each of you can identify with such forgetfulness. Maybe it's not a calendar for you, maybe its sticky notes, or a string around your finger. Nonetheless, sin has affected our memories and we forget many things - even important things - in our lives.

It is with this in mind that we return to our series from the book of Joshua. Chapter four is kind of a replay of chapter three, with a more in-depth look at the Jordan crossing. In chapter three we were left wondering why one man from each of the twelve tribes were selected before the crossing of the Jordan into Canaan. But here in chapter four our questions are answered. These twelve men were selected to haul stones from the dry riverbed of the Jordan to its western shores where they would erect a memorial. As we examine these memorial stones, let us learn to take advantages of similar memorials to the LORD in our midst as teaching tools for our children. As we do, we will be reminded that the instruction of our youth requires strong shoulders. May the Lord bless us as we study His Word.

REMINDE US OF THE GRACIOUS WORK OF GOD

Unless you were personally involved in it yourself, events of the past are very easy to forget. One way to remember events of the past is to memorialize them. If you visit our nation's capital you will see that there are endless memorials around the Capital Mall. Most prominent are the Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln memorials. All of these stone monuments were erected to remind people about these men and what they did as leaders of our country.

Last week we heard how the LORD safely guided the Children of Israel into the promised land of Canaan. Though the Jordan River was at flood stage, this was no obstacle for the LORD to fulfill His promise and land the people safely on Canaan's side. The almighty Creator of heaven and earth held back the waters of the Jordan and dried up the riverbed, so His people could cross safely.

This was an amazing work of the LORD. An event which that generation would not soon forget. But the LORD knows how easily we tend to forget from one generation to the next. So He commanded Joshua to tell the twelve men, ***"Take for yourselves twelve stones from here,***

***out of the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet stood firm. You shall carry them over with you and leave them in the lodging place where you lodge tonight."***

Those twelve stones would then be used to build a lasting memorial of the gracious work of the LORD in bringing them safely across the Jordan on dry ground.

Indeed, how easily we forget things - even important things! Could there be anything more important in our lives than our eternal salvation? Just as He brought the Children of Israel safely over into Canaan, so He has promised to bring us safely over to eternal life in heaven. But this is only possibly because of the cross of Jesus Christ. If Jesus had not suffered and died on the cross, we would still be responsible for our sins. If the eternal, almighty Son of God had not been born of the virgin Mary, if He had not taken on flesh and blood, He could not have died for our sins. If the Son of God did not do it, there would have been no sacrifice great enough to save our souls from the eternal fires of hell. But thanks be to God, as John writes that ***"the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."*** (1 Jn 1:7)

This is the gracious work of God to rescue us from our own sins. We did nothing to deserve it, God did it all for us out of His undeserved love. And we do not want to forget the gracious work of God, so we too set up sorts of memorial stones. Do you have memorial stones in your home which remind you of the gracious work of God? Sure you do! Some of you may even be wearing one today. Maybe they are not a pile of stones, such as was erected at the Jordan, but I'm pretty sure I've seen all sorts of memorial stones at your homes. Think of the number of crosses you have in your home! The cross is a reminder of the cost of your salvation and the love of God for you. It was on a cross that the Son of God was sacrificed to give us eternal life. It was on the cross of Christ that we were redeemed unto God.

We have all sorts of "memorial stones," don't we. When our Voter's set up the quarterly calendars, we speak of certain services that are "set in stone." We have special services in December to mark the birth of our Savior. We have special services in the Spring to remind ourselves of the cost of our salvation and the life that Jesus won for us. We have the baptismal font at the front of church to remind us of the gracious work of God in your baptism. How in we were baptized into Christ, your sins were washed away, and you were adopted into God's family. We have candles on the altar to remind us that Jesus is the light of the world. We have the altar to remind us of Jesus as the Lamb of God who was sacrificed on the altar of the cross for our sins. We have a picture of Jesus saving sinking Peter, even as He rescued when we were sinking in our sins.

We even celebrate a memorial meal, don't we? When we celebrate Lord's Supper we receive the very body and blood of our Savior Jesus in, with, and under the earthly elements bread and wine. His body and blood which was given and shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins. When Jesus instituted this sacrament He also said, ***"Do this in remembrance of Me."*** (Lk 22:19) In receiving Lord's Supper we are not only receiving spiritual blessings, but we are also remembering the gracious work of our God as Jesus gave His body and shed His blood for the forgiveness of our sins. All of these memorial stones are set up to remind us of the gracious work of our God.

#### USED TO TEACH OUR CHILDREN

So why did God want to have this memorial erected? I can't imagine that any of those who were present that day would ever forget how God held back the waters of the Jordan and

allowed all those people to pass over on dry ground. We learn in our text that it wasn't so much for their sakes, as it was for the sake of the generations to come. These memorial stones were valuable teaching tools about the gracious works of God. We read in last four verses of our text, ***"When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stones?' then you shall let your children know, saying, 'Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land'; for the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever."*** God had those stones set up because He knew that in coming generations children would see those stones and ask, "What does this mean?" The parents would then have a wonderful opportunity to tell their children about the wonderful works of God.

It is so important to the LORD that parents tell their children about all that He has done to save them. Jesus scolded His disciples when they tried to prevent the little ones from coming to Him. Jesus did not just come to save grown-ups from their grown-up sins, He also came to save the little ones from their own sin and the sin they inherited from their sinful parents. Jesus loves the little children, He died to save the little children too, and He wants them to know how much He loves them.

The various memorial stones we have can also serve as excellent teaching tools for our children. We can tell them the reason they have a cross hanging on the wall in their bedroom. When we go to Lord's Supper and our children ask why, we have the opportunity to tell them that Mom and Dad are sinners too and need forgiveness from God. We can point them to the baptismal font where they were baptized and made God's precious child. Our catechism serves as a sort of memorial stone too, doesn't it? We take our children through the basic teachings of Christian faith. And then we teach them to ask, "What does this mean?" and teach them the basics of the Christian faith.

All of these so-called "memorial stones" are used to teach our children. We do this, as Joshua says in the last verse of our text, that they ***"may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever."*** Let us use these memorial stones to teach our children about the mighty acts of the LORD to save us, that they may stand in awe of the LORD forever.

## REQUIRE STRONG SHOULDERS

So in your mind's eye, how big are those memorial stones that these twelve men are bringing up from the riverbed of the Jordan? Listen again to verse 5, ***"Cross over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and each one of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel."*** These stones were of such a size that they required strong shoulders to carry them to the western shore of the Jordan. Furthermore, keep in mind who each of these twelve men were representing - the twelve tribes of Israel. The men that carried these heavy memorial stones not just the professional "church people" from the tribe of Levi, but instead the lay-men of Israel who were carrying these memorial stones.

These are important truths for each one of us to keep in mind as we consider teaching our children about the gracious works of God. First of all it requires strong shoulders. Christian

education is heavy lifting. Families are busier than ever with athletic obligations and school work. It seems that it is becoming harder and harder for families to find quality time to spend together. Which means it is harder to have family devotions and family Bible study. It requires strong shoulders to spend time in God's Word as a family every day. But God wants such memorial stones erected not just on Sunday mornings at church, but everyday at home. He wants Christian parents, especially fathers, to bring up their children ***"in the training and admonition of the Lord."*** (Eph 6:4) In fact, Martin Luther originally drew up his Small Commandment, not necessarily for pastors to teach members, but for fathers to teach their children at home.

And remember on whose shoulders it fell to bear the burden of carrying those memorial stones out of the Jordan? It was not just the professional clergy from the tribe of Levi, it was also the laymen of the twelve tribes of Israel. Even so, telling the next generation about the gracious works of God does not fall just on the shoulders of the pastor - God calls on laymen and women to take up this eternally important work. Therefore we call on laymen and women to tell our children in Sunday School about the gracious works of God. At home we work listen to our children recite their memory work, we talk about what we heard in church, and we make time for home devotions. Indeed, it requires strong shoulders to set up memorial stones and teach our children about the gracious works of God.

We forget things, so easily, don't we. It is one thing to forget to buy desert when you are at the grocery store. It is another thing entirely to forget about the gracious works of our God to save us. Let us not only remember His gracious work ourselves, but let us remember to tell our children and grandchildren about all Jesus did so we could go to heaven. May God ever help us to be faithful in proclaiming all His wonderful works to the generation to come! Amen.