



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

October 20, 2019

"Trust Him" - Raise The Sails Sermon Series

Jenny Sung

**G**ood morning! My name is Jenny Sung, the executive coordinator on staff at First Prez. We are in week three of our sermon series, "Raise The Sails", in the book of Joshua. We have set sail on a new chapter, a voyage to learn more about God's generosity and what it means to follow Him, to prioritize and trust in Him.

Last week we heard an amazing sermon from Chris Pan on Joshua chapter two, a sermon where we were charged to walk out into a world in need and declare, "*Our lives for your lives*"... because Jesus gave His life for all of us.

We continue today to look at the events in chapter three of Joshua, where the people of God finally cross through the Jordan river into the promised land. It's another miraculous parting of the waters, quite reminiscent of the parting of the Red Sea when Moses led the Israelites out of slavery. But here, it's not the Red sea, it's the Jordan river. And they're not fleeing a land of bondage; they are entering into the promised land. It's a miracle that allows the people of God to pass

through the waters and cross on dry land. Joshua takes the Israelites into the land God had promised them, but it's not without some faith, testing and trust in the God who promises to be with them.

Have you ever tried to follow someone to a place you've never been before? You've never gone that way, you have no idea how to get there, but you are trusting in someone else to take you there?

In my case, I was trusting my best friend, who was trusting in google maps. Let me share this story with you.

I went on vacation one year and my best friend and I were in Watford, England to find the church, Soul Survivor for their 4:30pm worship service.

We had met pastor Mike Pilavachi when he taught in Hawaii at the Honolulu conferences, so when we took a vacation to England, we decided to visit his church.

London was quite new to us.

For example, did you know that an elevator was called the

lift, that smashed up peas always come with your fish and chips, or that the underground rail was called the Tube?

Well several Tube stations later, we left London arrived at Watford Junction station, and then walked the rest of the way to Soul Survivor. Laura Kay said it was a 25 minute walk, and that didn't seem so bad, quite doable, right?

She led the way with her eyes glued on her phone as we walked the streets. She is a fast walker, and I'm a slow walker, so basically I was chasing her though the streets of Watford as I trusted where she was going. We went through the town, then came into a residential area with rows and rows of houses. I think at one point we crossed through someone's back yard. It felt like we were walking in the wilderness of Watford for 40 years, with no church in sight.

I felt like the Israelites who did NOT go into the promised land- I felt like the ones who grumbled and complained to Moses. I said, "Hey, are you sure we're going the right way? Are you sure you're leading us to Soul Survivor??"

**Y**ou see, by that point we had entered an industrial district with shipping containers and warehouses. There was no one around, the streets looked deserted, and the geography didn't look like it would house a church anywhere. Logically, it just didn't seem possible.

Well I should have had more trust and faith in my friend, who was one of the most trustworthy and sharp people I know, and I should have trusted her little map. It turns out that we were exactly in the right place, and we crossed over into Soul Survivor church with about the friendliest people and nicest staff I had ever met. We were in the land of worship and prayer with the people of God. After the service people invited us to stay for dinner and drinks, a fond memory I have to this day.

Now I know this was a light story about following google maps, but it illustrated that in the land of the unknown, it can be hard to trust in someone else, to trust beyond what you see and follow in obedience. One of the most significant lines in chapter 3 is when the people of God are getting ready to cross the Jordan River. Joshua tells the people in verse 9, *"this is how you know that THE LIVING GOD IS AMONG YOU..."*

The Living God...

We do not have a distant God who is dead and removed from connection to His people. No, He is with us. He is among us. He is alive. Over and over again in the Bible, God

reminds us of this fact- *"I am the living God who goes before you, and I am among you"...* and the question is, "Do we know and trust Him as THE LIVING GOD among us?" And if so, are we faithful to follow and obey, even when that means to go and stand in the flooding river?

One of the practices here at First Prez is to read Scripture together. Many of us have experienced the Just Show Up public reading of Scripture groups on Sundays, and in WAKO, small groups, etc. This is where we gather to listen to and read the Bible together, in community. This practice was so important that the apostle Paul, one of the most prominent writers of the New Testament, instructed his disciple Timothy to *"devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching"* (1 Timothy 4:13).

I know that many churches emphasize good teaching and preaching, and that's wonderful, but I feel that the public reading of Scripture gets delegated to a private activity, something that we assume we're all doing on our own. It's not emphasized as a communal practice shared with one another. But this communal practice is integral to our story as the people of God. It is life giving and designed to be done regularly with one another.

I want to share a video by N.T. Wright about the practice of reading God's Word together and why it's so important.

Wright is a theologian, author, and professor, reputed as one of the most prolific biblical scholars in a generation. Some say he is the most important apologist for the Christian faith since C. S. Lewis. His current teaching post is at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, where this video was recorded. This 3-minute excerpt from the video is part of a course so let me warn you it is a bit academic.

He's got the bookcase in the background with a cardigan vest- yes it's all kinda nerdy unless you love that sort of thing. But please listen to what he says about the public reading of Scripture and why it's so important for us as the people of God. He shares why it's important to get used to hearing the whole story of God in the Bible (creation to new creation) and how we need to become people of the biblical story again. He reminds us that we are a part of God's narrative, and that we are called to remember, to be formed and shaped by the Word, as a community.

(<https://vimeo.com/350856241>)

So now, as the people of God, may His Word form and shape us as we read today's passage.

We are in the book of Joshua, chapter 3, verses 1-17. You can turn to your Bibles, or if you have your navigational guide, it's printed on page 30. I'll give you a moment, then we will read the Word together.

**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. But keep a distance of about two thousand cubits between you and the ark; do not go near it.”

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.

This is a miraculous passage, a story displaying God’s power, His leading, and the obedience of God’s people to trust and follow. When we studied this passage with the elders at the monthly session meeting this

week, Sherri Shephard pointed out how miraculous it was that the land was recorded as dry. You would think that with the water receding it would be muddy or wet, but the ground was dry. God intervened and did the impossible by enabling His people to pass.

When you study this passage, there are key elements that come to light as we go through the chapter:

One of the first things we see is that God goes before His people. We are called to seek Him and follow. From the first chapter of Joshua we know that the Israelites are getting ready to break camp. The people knew that they were entering into the promised land, but they don’t know exactly how it’s going to happen. They had never been this way before. As Joshua prepares the people to break camp, God tells him to send out these orders to the people in verse 3- “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.”

This is a really important point. Notice the words “When you see, move and follow.” You see, in the Old Testament, the ark of the covenant was the place of presence. The tabernacle was constructed so that the Lord would be among His people. For the Israelites, the Ark of the Covenant meant God’s presence.

It's like God is saying, "Do not fear because I will go before you and show you the way. Realize that my presence is everything."

You see, what we bring is nothing compared to what He brings. What He brings is everything. None of our skills, our strategies, our human intellect or strength matters without the presence of God. We are to seek Him so that when we sense His presence, we can move and follow.

We just had the Life in the Spirit conference in the last two days, where speaker Mark Marx came and shared. Mark is the founding leader of Healing on the Streets, a ministry where people go out into the city introduce people to the love of Jesus through healing prayer. He prays with complete strangers in the streets of the city. The stories he shared were absolutely miraculous, legs growing and people cured of diseases and pain. He shared how some people look at the way they set up the chairs and the banner in the streets and they go, "Oh yeah, we'll do that. We'll set it up exactly like that and do what they do." But he said that nothing matters without the presence of Jesus, because nothing, zilch, will happen without His presence.

He expanded his thoughts on a blog that I read, where he shared: "Prepare by spending time with Jesus daily. Get closer to Him, and love people like He loves people. Be prepared to pay the cost. Kneel to pray before you start. Don't get off

the ground until His presence comes. Either stay kneeling until His presence fills the air you breathe, or pack up and go home. Because nothing... zilch... will happen without His presence.

Don't be distracted during your time on the streets. Your awareness of Him, and your intentional pressing into Him, and carrying and nurturing His presence is vital. Have faith, be courageous, act courageously, and don't fear man."

([https://www.wordonthestreets.net/Articles/500484/Healing\\_on\\_the.aspx](https://www.wordonthestreets.net/Articles/500484/Healing_on_the.aspx))

Mark Marx's words in that paragraph connect us to a second key element in this story to consecrate ourselves. In verse 5, Joshua told the people as they prepared to cross into the promised land, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."

What does that word mean, "Consecrate"? To consecrate oneself is to set yourself apart from every hindrance, every sin, every temptation that keeps us from walking in the will of God. It's basically the devoting or setting apart of anything to the worship or service of God.

We want to set our minds, our hearts and lives on who God is and what God wants for us. Prayer and fasting are some of the ways you can do that.

We just started a 40-day fast, which is like a spiritual reboot.

You can abstain from a meal, or a specific food, drink, or activity like grumbling or criticizing or gossiping.

Instead of doing those things, you spend the time pressing into God with prayer, reflection and reading His Word. This helps us to disconnect from the negative habits and focus more on God.

It's a spiritual discipline that deepens our relationship with God. Verse 5 says, "Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things."

As we step out in humility and consecrate ourselves to God, He is faithful to be with us and guide us through the water. Look for the amazing things He is doing.

In the last portion of this story, Joshua reminds them that the living God is among His people. God will go into the Jordan ahead of them and drive out their enemies. The instructions are clear to the priests who are carrying the ark, "When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river." The only thing separating them from the promised land at this particular instance was the Jordan river. Usually, the best way to cross a river is through a ford, which is defined as a shallow place with good footing. This would be the safe choice for animals and people to wade into the water.

But notice the Jordan river was at flood stage with deep, muddy water and no fords to

**C**ross. Water overflowed its banks (recorded as 14 feet higher than the normal level). But the priests, the specially appointed leaders who were chosen to carry the ark, they go. They go ahead of all the people and walk straight toward the river, obedient to what God is calling them to do.

Sometimes, we may sense God asking us to do something or go somewhere that looks overwhelming, or impossible.

We may look at the deep, muddy waters and go, "You're asking me to do What???" We may hear God asking us to do something really difficult or risk for Him in sacrificial ways. Maybe it's to give for the good of others, forgive someone who has hurt you, take a stand for truth and justice, or open up your heart to trust Him in deeper ways.

We remember the words of Joshua 1:9, *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."*

The Lord our God is with us wherever we go. As we go through this season and press into what God is doing, we have these wrist bands and commitment cards to remind us to pray. They are visible reminders of a generous God who goes before us and never leaves us. We hope that God will reveal more of His character, His love and faithfulness to you.

In this generosity voyage, we've been exploring questions about trust, security and prioritizing Him. Different members of the church have been sharing their testimonies of faith.

I've been getting to know Nora Cunning, who's been helping with social media for our downtown campus, The Vine. As we watch this video, listen to what Nora shares about trust and the widow's mite. Nora took a step of trust in God, a "proclamation" as she called it. She touched her feet to the water's edge and witnessed a response from God, just from that one faith step.

<https://vimeo.com/367355215>

I think it shows we serve a generous God, someone you can turn to and fully trust. Let's not put limits on what we think God can do. Let us lean in, trust Him and see where He leads us.

+ + + + + + + + +

*Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at [fpchawaii.org](http://fpchawaii.org). The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by visiting: [fpchkoolau@gmail.com](mailto:fpchkoolau@gmail.com)*