



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

October 27, 2019

“Believe Him—Stones of Remembrance”

Raise the Sails Sermon Series — Pastor Dan Chun

**J**oshua 4:1-24 *When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, “Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, 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.”*

*So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, 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, to serve as a sign among you.*

*In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ 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.”*

*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.*

*Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been 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.*

*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, 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.*

*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. About forty thousand armed for battle crossed over before the Lord to the plains of Jericho for war.*

*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.*

*Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Command the priests carrying the ark of the covenant law to come up out of the Jordan.” So Joshua commanded the priests, “Come up out of the Jordan.” 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.*

Following God is exciting—but at the same time, not easy. Not for us today and neither was it for the Israelites thousands of years ago.

Following God can cause anxiety and fear. It can be unsettling and challenging. It can cut to the very core of what we hold dearly. Whether it's time, talent, resources, or our physical safety.

Because following God stretches us, takes us beyond our comfort zone, our logic of thinking. And it means we have to risk and dare for the Lord.

It also means we need to trust God even when things get harder and not easier to obey Him.

We just read to Joshua 4, where Joshua is leading the Israelites across the Jordan River. Before Joshua, Moses was their leader. Moses promised them that God would take them out of Egypt, where they had been slaves for more than 400 years. Great news! Happy days are here again.

But it was not an easy departure. The Egyptian Pharaoh would not let them go.

**S**o God sends ten plagues to the land of Egypt in the hope that one of the plagues would break Pharaoh's stubborn will.

First plague: water everywhere turns into blood making it undrinkable.

The second plague: armies of frogs throughout the land.

And then clouds of gnats.

And then swarms of flies.

Then a plague on all of their livestock.

Then boils on all people.

And then a hailstorm.

And then swarms of locusts.

And then darkness with no sunlight.

And then finally the death of first-born children. It was only after that last plague that Pharaoh finally let the Israelites go.

And so the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt began. God gave them a pillar of cloud to follow during the day and a pillar of fire at night.

**Ex. 14:31** *And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in Him and in Moses His servant.*

Now you would think the Israelites, who had seen so many miracles, would have the strongest, most firm faith in the world. They got to witness first-hand the ten plagues and the pillars of fire and cloud and the parting of the Red Sea. God is great indeed! The King always has one more move!

But somehow there was wide-spread memory loss among the Israelites of how God had delivered them in so many ways.

There are two major water crossings for the Israelites—the first one at the Red Sea that I just described and the second one is without Moses, but with Joshua, when the Israelites crossed the Jordan River, which is our Scripture passage for today. Both times, the Lord divided the waters to let His people go.

But something is interesting about this second one.

A raging river is before the people of Israel, and they need to cross it. God tells the priests to walk into the river with the Ark of the Covenant and when the hem of their garments are wet, when they have risked and trusted Him as they walk into a flooding river, then and only then will He stop the waters so all of Israel could walk through.

But unlike the crossing of the Red Sea, the crossing of the Jordan River involved making a memorial to remember what God made possible for them.

God instructed them to take 12 stones from the Jordan River and create a memorial out of them. Twelve stones of remembrance. And where were they taken from? Right in the middle of the river, right where the people were most vulnerable if the waters came back. Right there. They were to take 12 stones to remember the mighty work and miracle of God, who pushed back the high tides of the Jordan River so that a million people could walk through on the dry river bed.

Now—most interesting—the first time they went through the Red Sea, they didn't make a

remembrance. They sang a song, but no permanent remembrance.

This time, God said make a memorial of 12 stones, one for each of the 12 tribes of Israel that was saved.

There is a part of our hearts that we are all like the Israelites. We forget God's goodness. We forget the miracles after a while. We can forget that the King always has one more move, that we should be strong and courageous as Joshua 1:9 says. We wear wristbands with that scripture because we need the memory, that reminder. And often, when God asks us to do something, we need faith.

But on this river crossing, God tells Joshua to make a pile of big rocks as stones of remembrance of how God called the people into a miracle and how he demonstrated a miracle before their eyes. Only when the hem of their robes got wet would God know that they had the faith that God would do a miracle.

It's only when we have faith and show our obedience to God, will God show the miracle He has in store for us. When God talks to us, sometimes we need to step out in faith in order to see what God does. A car in neutral doesn't move. Neither does a faith in neutral.

God knows that we all need stones of remembrances to remind us of God's kindness and love for us.

There are times when we hear the wrongful voices in our minds that says, you are not good enough, you are not pretty enough, handsome enough, accomplished enough, you will never amount to anything, or—worse yet—harm yourself, cut yourself, for you are of no worth, or that God doesn't exist and He won't help you.

It is at those times, we might need a stone of remembrance that says, "Those are lies in my head. Those are not the words of loving Jesus, but more like Satan. The odds may be against me, but Jesus the King of Kings always has one more move. I need a stone of remembrance to remember that God loves me. He says I am of great worth. I am valuable. And He loves me.

### **Stones of remembrances come in many forms.**

- 1. Rituals**
- 2. Objects**
- 3. People**

The first is rituals. Why do we celebrate Christmas and Easter or Advent and Lent? They are part of our ritual to remind us, over and over again, against all of the static and noise and shopping in the world that Jesus was born, died on the cross for us, and was raised again. He is God. Not a man, but God on earth. He loves us so much that He sacrificed His life for us.

We celebrate Thanksgiving to remind us that we should be thankful for all that we have.

I mean this most sincerely: since we started this generosity journey and I have really been studying and delving into the generosity of God, it has deeply, deeply changed my life. I see His generosity everywhere, and I want to be generous. I want to be like my Lord. I feel closer to Him in thanksgiving.

When I look over my life, when I look over all of the Bible, I am amazed how deeply generous God is with us. All of His grace and love and mercy is way over the top. Jesus' sacrificial torture and death that He chose to do for us is way over the top.

When I look at how God was so way over the top in kindness and in

helping the Israelites and yet they whined so much and was so stingy in their faith on Him, I am blown away.

I want to have a generous character with everyone, always, at all times, with strangers, with friends and relatives and, yes, with my faith community.

I think of Kathryn Scott who led worship for the Life in the Spirit Conference last weekend here at church. I heard that a barista at Starbucks said she was his *favorite* regular customer because she was always so overflowing with gratitude to the server when she would just order a coffee. I want to be that kind of person who is generous with courtesy and kindness and gratitude.

Her ritual of going regularly to get coffee became a sign of God's love to a stranger barista.

So rituals are a stone of remembrance.

A second one is objects. The choosing of the 12 stones from the Jordan River is clearly the precedent for this second point.

I think objects are important ways to remember God's kindness, love, generosity, and grace. I have many stones of remembrance, so to speak, in my office.

One is a simple twig that I took off the grave of C.S. Lewis in England. C.S. Lewis was so instrumental in my faith as a young Christian through many of his books like *Mere Christianity* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*. His writings today are still so foundational to my understanding Jesus. I look at the twig and remember God's goodness that C.S. Lewis taught me.

Another stone of remembrance in my office is a fine bone china

mug with a painting of the Australian bird called the kookaburra. I will always remember it as a sign of God's immense grace and deep, deep love. Why the mug? Years ago, on July 12, 2009, I preached on Robert Schuller's Hour of Power TV service which at the time allegedly reached 4 million people around the world.

I feel fortunate that God gets people to pay my way to different states and countries to preach or meet with leaders.

During my sermon I felt I needed to say these few lines and here were my exact words, which I say again to this congregation:

*If it feels there is no purpose in your life, do not give up. You may have suicidal thoughts, but don't do it. God is saying to you, "Don't do it. I have a future and a hope for you, if you don't give up.*

Little did I know that way off in Australia was a man who was about to kill himself. His wife had seen my sermon on TV and knew that the station would be playing it again later that day. So she asked her husband, who was going through a deep depression, to come home and see it with her.

He watched it. It was a sermon about God's love called, "God Knows Your Name." He watched it and, at that moment, decided not to commit suicide. He said that if it were not for that sermon, he would have indeed killed himself.

After that show, he somehow got my email address from the Crystal Cathedral and wrote me to tell me his story. He was a Christian who was going through a tough, depressing time. But somehow that sermon got through to him, helped him, saved him.

**H**e rededicated his life to Christ. And we met each other when he visited Hawaii. He gave me the kookaburra mug. Now, I see him and his wife almost every year when they travel through to Hawaii. We always have a meal together. And we continue to email and have become friends for the last 10 years. Every time I see that mug with the kookaburra on it, I think of him and God's generous grace and mercy and how he used a short Asian guy thousands of miles away to reach an Australian's heart to tell him that God loves him and has loved him from the day he was born.

It reminds me that the King always has one more move if we can hang in there.

Other stones of remembrance, two of the greatest in fact, are the cup and the bread that we see and partake during communion. What might be your objects of remembrance of God?

And a final stone of remembrance in our lives can be people. There are people in my life who are living treasures. They are constant reminders of God's grace and wisdom and love.

When they suffered, they remained so loyal to God that it buoyed up my faith. They were kind and loving. Their wisdom reminds me of a loving God.

Or I think of someone like Ken and Becky Yeung who have devoted their time, talent and resources to help orphans with special needs in China.

And then there are those who have passed away, First Prez members who have become my stones of remembrance. I probably do about 10 funerals a year. It's been that way since I first became your pastor.

I have said to you that sometimes I think I always have a low-grade level of depression that stems from constant grief in losing so many friends who were part of this church.

Their lives of faithfulness and joy are constant reminders to me of God.

When it comes to our Raise the Sails generosity journey that involves growing deeper in our walk with the Lord, and the investing of resources to repair this building and to expand ministries, what keeps me going is that I want to repair the campus that they helped to buy and build. This was their house of faith. I want to continue *their* passion of reaching more people for Christ, of helping the poor in this country and in other developing countries. First Prez members who have passed away are some of my stones of remembrance.

And so, in closing this sermon, I want us to think of First Prez members who have gone ahead of us and are now with the Lord. They were veteran Christians and new Christians who loved Jesus and built this church. We will not forget them. They have passed the baton to us. May we not drop the baton, but run the race.

They have passed us the lines to Raise our church's Sails once again. To catch the wind of the Holy Spirit for our next journey. They would want us to expand our ministry to reach even more in the world. They would want us to take care of this house—repair and refurbish it. We continue their legacy and ministry.

We each have our own stones of remembrance. What are yours? Take the time this week to identify them.

But don't forget the greatest living Stone is Jesus Christ who loves you, died for you and would do anything for you if you just ask and follow Him.

Know too that in following Him you are a valuable precious stone. For as the Bible says:

**1 Peter 2:4-5** *As you come to Him, the living Stone—rejected by human beings but chosen by God and precious to Him—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.*

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Note: Sunday sermon texts, as well as audio and video recordings of sermons, also are available at [fpchawaii.org](http://fpchawaii.org) by clicking the Messages tab.