

Message: “Stepping Forward”, presented by Reverend Kristen Lowe on 08-27-2017 at Crossroads United Methodist Church, Waunakee, WI.

Our story in our scripture this morning finds the Israeli people, who had been freed from captivity in Egypt, still moving toward the Promised Land. Moses has died and now young Joshua was in charge of getting them safely to their destination. They are also bringing the stone tablets that contained the Ten Commandments in a holy vessel called the ark of the Covenant.

Early in the morning Joshua rose and set out from Shittim with all the Israelites, and they came to the Jordan. They camped there before crossing over. At the end of three days the officers went through the camp and commanded the people, “When you see the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place. Follow it, so that you may know the way you should go, for you have not passed this way before. Yet there shall be a space between you and it, a distance of about two thousand cubits; do not come any nearer to it.” Then Joshua said to the people, “Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.” To the priests Joshua said, “Take up the Ark of the Covenant, and pass on in front of the people.” So they took up the Ark of the Covenant and went in front of the people.

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 Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, 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.

Blessed be the hearing of the word.

Message: "Stepping Forward"



What do an airplane, bicycle and a church have in common?

If either stops moving forward, you're in trouble!



Message: “Stepping Forward

Likewise, we, as Christians and the church must keep moving forward. And we do that by following these five steps:

1. Consult the Lord.
2. Read the Word.
3. Listen for God’s leading.
4. Follow in faith and obedience.
5. Expect the miraculous.

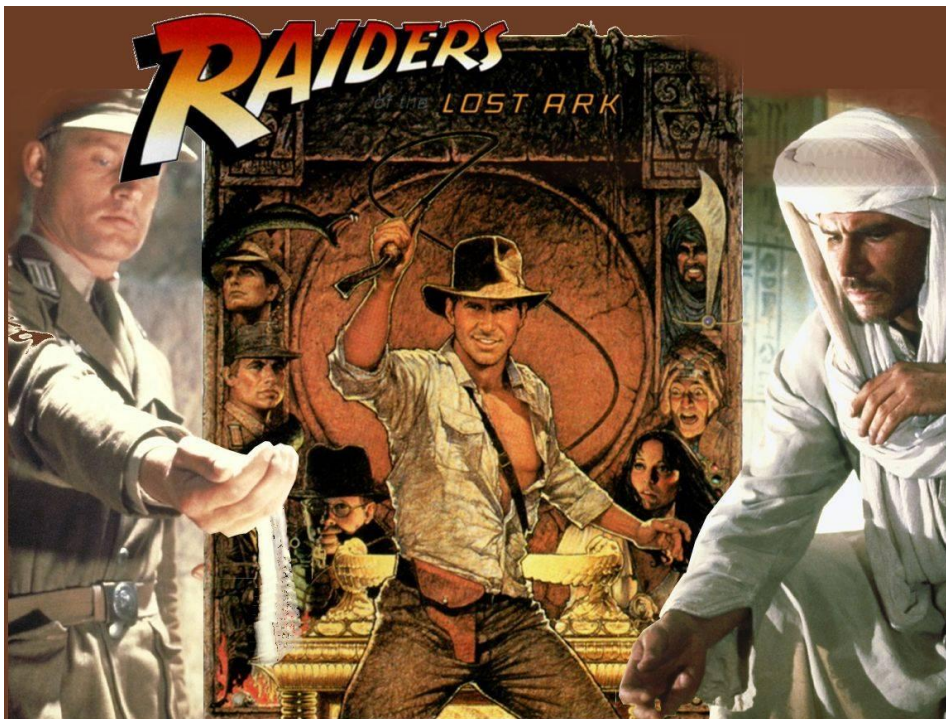
Now, notice the scripture that we read starts out with Joshua being on fire for God. He is passionate. He is determined. From the very first verse of this verse, we see the heart of Joshua. He rose early in the morning. God gave him an opportunity and he acted.

- a. Joshua had a heart that was passionate in following the Lord.
- b. When God told Joshua to move he did.

Some people, when God tells them to do something, respond by saying:

- a. That doesn’t make sense.
- b. People say I should do something different.
- c. If I go with what God wants e to do, I’ll fail.

In verse 3, Joshua tells the Israelites, “When you see the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD your God, and the priest carrying it, you need to go and follow it.”



How many of you have seen “Indiana Jones and the Lost Ark”?

Message: “Stepping Forward”

Ok, so you know that the Ark was precious to the Israelites for two reasons.

First, because it contained the two tables of the law—the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.

Secondly, and more importantly, it represented to them the presence of Yahweh Himself.

In essence, following the ark was the same as following God.

We are not always sure which way to go, but with God leading the way we can move with confidence. Because we know that God has promised never to leave us or forsake us.



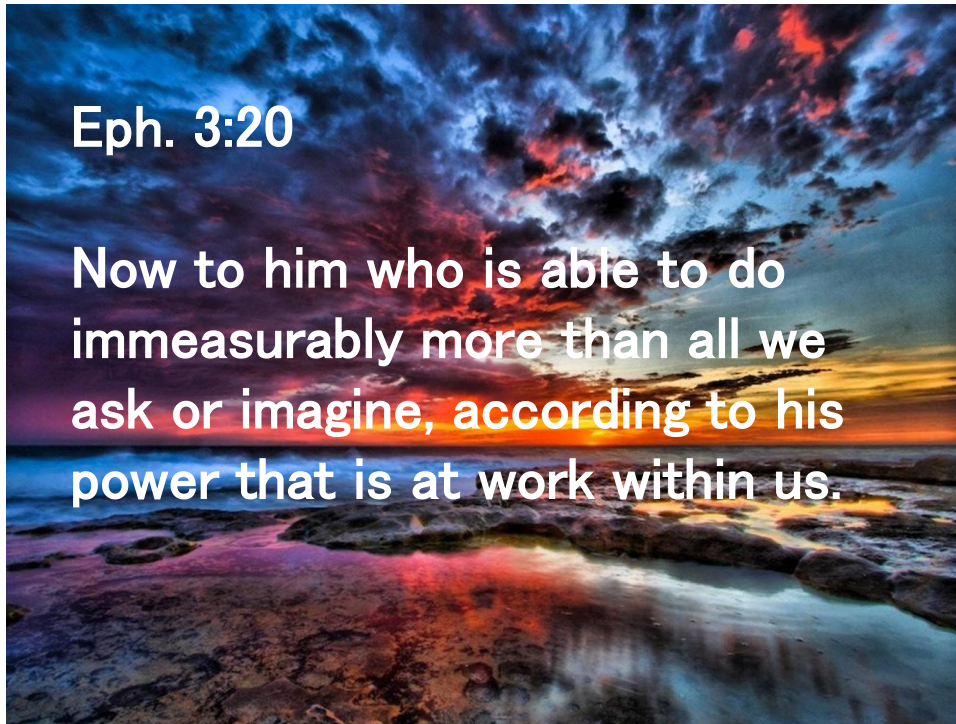
The Australian coat of arms pictures two creatures—the emu, a flightless bird, and the kangaroo. The animals were chosen because they share a characteristic that appealed to the Australian citizens. Both the emu and kangaroo can move only forward, not back. The emu’s three-toed foot causes it to fall if it tried to go backwards, and the kangaroo is prevented from moving in reverse by its large tail.

If we truly choose to follow Jesus, we become like the emu and kangaroo, moving only forward, never back.

When God tells us to move we have a choice. We can move forward and be blessed or we can stay where we are and become stagnant.

You see, God was going to do things that would absolutely amaze them. If we step out in faith, God will do things that are beyond our imagination.

Message: “Stepping Forward



The point is, our God has the power over all things, and He is able to do immeasurably more than we can even imagine. But we must be willing to step forward to see it. And sometimes that's hard! It's easier to just stay put where it's safe and comfortable.



Joshua tells the priests to “Take up the Ark of the Covenant and pass on ahead of the people.”

This was a tremendous step of faith on their part.

Message: “Stepping Forward

Although they were used to carrying the Ark, this is the first time that it was leading the way. Up until now the Ark was in the midst of the people, but now it was at the head of the line. But they did it without hesitation or question.

It was precarious to carry the Ark of the Covenant. This was where the stone tablets were held. The ones written by God’s own finger. It was so utterly holy that touching it or looking upon it could cause death. If you were carrying this sacred vessel, you’d better be wide awake, sure footed and not easily distracted.



And now it gets even trickier. Joshua tells them, “When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and into the river.”

Verse 15 tells us that the river was at flood stage and its banks would have been over flown. The word Jordan means “to descend” and many believe the reason for the name is because its banks were anywhere from 12 to 14 feet high.

And the water wasn’t tamed and corralled like it is today, providing water for various towns along the way. No, remember the song “Michael Row the Boat Ashore... Hallelujah, Jordan’s river is...”

And it was!

So for them to step into the water was literally a step of faith.

Can you see it now? The priests, carrying this precious cargo step off the bank and into the water. Their feet are wet, their ankles, now the hem of their robes... soon they would be over their heads.

Message: “Stepping Forward

There’s a story of a guy who wanted to impress his hunting buddies. To impress them, he bought the smartest, most expensive hunting dog he could find. He trained this dog to do things no other dog on earth could do—impossible feats that would surely amaze anyone. Then he invited the neighbors to go duck hunting with him. After a long, patient wait in the boat a group of ducks flew over and the hunters were able to make a few hits. Several ducks fell in the water. “Go get ‘em!” shouted the proud owner to his magnificent dog.



The dog leaped out of the boat, walked on the water, and picked up a bird and returned to the boat. As soon as he dropped the duck in the boat he trotted off across the water again and grabbed another duck and brought it back to the boat. The owner beamed with pride as his wonderful dog walked across the water and retrieved each of the birds one by one. Unable to resist the opportunity to brag a bit, he asked his fellow hunters, “Do you notice anything unusual about my dog?” One of them rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “Yes,” he finally said, “Come to think of it, I do! That silly dog doesn’t know how to swim, does he?”

Message: "Stepping Forward"



1. One thing we know for sure; if we are going to follow God, it is going to take faith.
2. God is going to ask us to do things that to us seem difficult, if not impossible.
3. God is going to ask us to go where we cannot see.
4. God is going to take us places we have never been.
5. God is going to ask us to do things we do not know how to do.
6. Unless we are willing to step out in faith we will never:
7. Accomplish what God wants us to do.

When the priests took the next step, the waters from the way up at the mouth of the river stopped. They found themselves standing on dry ground. They moved forward. The Israelite followed.

If we step out in faith we are going to see:

The improbable become doable;

The impractical become possible;

The impossible become reality.

When we do what God says, and follow Him without question, we can expect the miraculous.

Does God still do miracles? Yes, I've seen them myself.

Do you want to be part of the miracle that God wants to work through you?

Are you willing to step out in faith and obedience?

Message: "Stepping Forward"



What swollen river is God calling you to cross?