Verses: Joshua 4:1-9 and Mark 3:13-19 Occasion: Worship

Location: First Presbyterian Church of Lake Mary January 17, 2021

Pastor: Joe Raymond

**Song**

The Baptism of the Lord 2021. January 10, 2021

Verses: Psalm 85:8-10 and Matthew 3:13-17 Occasion: Worship

Location: First Presbyterian Church of Lake Mary January 10, 2021

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Song

Holy, holy, holy!

Lord God Almighty

Early in the morning

Our song shall rise to Thee

Holy, holy, holy!

Merciful and mighty

God in three persons

Blessed Trinit

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**To God be the glory
Great things He has done
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin
And opened the life-gate that all may go in**

**Praise the Lord, praise the Lord
Let the earth hear His voice
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord
Let the people rejoice
Come to the Father
Through Jesus the Son
Give Him the glory
Great things He has done**

**Stones of Witness**

Scripture readings**: Joshua 4:1-9 and Mark 3:13-19**

**Joshua 4:1-9**

When the entire nation had finished crossing over the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua: 2 “Select twelve men from the people, one from each tribe, 3 and command them, ‘Take twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests’ feet stood, carry them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you camp tonight.’” 4 Then Joshua summoned the twelve men from the Israelites, whom he had appointed, one from each tribe. 5 Joshua said to them, “Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, one for each of the tribes of the Israelites, 6 so that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, ‘What do those stones mean to you?’ 7 then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off in front of the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the Israelites a memorial forever.”

8 The Israelites did as Joshua commanded. They took up twelve stones out of the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the Lord told Joshua, carried them over with them to the place where they camped, and laid them down there. 9 (Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day.)

**Mark 3:13-19**

13 **He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him.**14 **And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message,**15 **and to have authority to cast out demons.**16 **So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter);**17 **James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder);**18 **and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean,**19 **and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.**

**This is the word of the Lord! Thanks be to God.**

**Let us pray**

 Heavenly Father, please quiet our minds and open our hearts

to Your truth,

and please

**…let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
   O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.**

**Amen**

**Sermon**

Last week, we studied the baptism of Jesus juxtaposed with the story of the Israelites’ crossing the dry riverbed of the Jordan.

We noticed similarities in the two, and I want to briefly review, so we can continue on today, as there was not enough time for everything last week.

Let us review:

1. The names, “Jesus” and “Joshua”, both mean “Jehovah is salvation.”
2. Both events happened in the same place.
3. God’s presence was manifested in both events:
	* at the river crossing…by the Ark of the Covenant
	* at the baptism…God’s voice and the Holy Spirit’s alighting on Jesus
4. The Israelites’ crossing the river to the Promised Land foreshadowed Jesus’s baptism.
5. Both events involved a transfer of leadership with the ultimate leadership transferred to Jesus Himself.
6. Both events marked new beginnings.
* For the Israelites, a new life in the Promised Land began.
* For Jesus, His ministry on earth was unveiled.

Today, we will look at more details displaying additional similarities in God’s plan, through both Old and New Testament eras, to now!

Friends, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob does not change.

This will be evident in our study today.

In Genesis, we learn that **God chose a man**, Abraham, and promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. God gave Abraham a son, Isaac. Isaac’s son was Jacob. Jacob’s name was later changed to Israel, and he had 12 sons. Thus began the 12 tribes of Israel.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Reuben | Simeon | Levi | Judah |
| Dan | Naphtali | Gad | Asher |
| Issachar | Zebulun | Joseph | Benjamin |

These 12 sons of God’s covenant, first introduced in Genesis, are significant all through the Bible. For example, in Exodus 39, 12 onyx stones, each engraved with the name of a son, are part of the priest’s required accessories, and in Revelation 21, there are 12 gates, each marked with the name of a son.

Today, in Joshua 4:5, we learned that God told Joshua to instruct one man from each tribe to gather, from the riverbed, one stone each and carry it on his shoulders to the opposite side. (probably large stones)

The stones were to be assembled where the Israelites camped that night.

Why?

In ancient times, such stones, called “standing stones”, served as memory aides! We might liken these stones to modern-day statues, and in a sense they were, but they were much more than that.

Modern-day statues are typically carved in the image of a famous person to commemorate his accomplishments.

By contrast, these Old Testament stones were not for the purpose of honoring a person who accomplished something, but rather to honor God, who had accomplished something for people that they could never do for themselves!

Intentionally, they were uncarved, and intentionally, they were to spark conversations!

How? Joshua 4:20-23 explains:

20 Those twelve stones, which they had taken out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal, 21 saying to the Israelites, “When your children ask their parents in time to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ 22 then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground.’ 23 For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you crossed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we crossed over,

What was God’s intention here? 24 …so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, and so that you may fear the Lord your God forever.”

Note that God’s purpose applies to more than just the parting of the Jordan, for it also reaches back into history to glorify God by recalling His power at the Red Sea!

Both of these miracles kept the people from being swept under the deep water,

which was, to the Israelites, a metaphor for judgment and death.

So, the 12-stone monument was to be a memorial to young and old through all generations of God’s mighty acts of salvation.

Now, let us fast forward to explore a parallel to New Testament times.

After His baptism, did Jesus build a monument of 12 large stones?

No, but He did choose 12 stones…that is…12 living stones…His 12 apostles!

The 12 were ordinary men (ordinary stones) collected from an ordinary group of people, but Jesus chose them for a purpose. They were to testify, not of their own accomplishments, but of Jesus’s.

Just as the Ark stood between the wall of water in the Jordan and the Israelites, Jesus stands between God’s wrath and guilty sinners for those who trust in Jesus for salvation.

The apostles were living stones of witness to this truth.

Peter explained:

1 Peter 2

5 like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Does this stone-of-witness imagery have meaning today?

Yes! All believers are similarly called to be living stones of witness, built into a spiritual house, standing with other such stones.

In our environments, we probably do not have physical rocks standing on end to spark conversations (although we might consider doing that), but we hold in our hands standing stones in print form!

We have Bibles!

The words in it all proclaim the mighty deeds of God!

Do your friends and family members see you reading your Bible?

Bible stories are a great conversation starter, especially in your own home.

Friends,

* All believers have the power to be living stones of witness! Acts 1:8

…you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

* We hold in our hands, and hopefully more and more in our hearts, the standing stones of God’s word. Ps119:11

I treasure your word in my heart,
    so that I may not sin against you.

* We are to be stones of witness about His glory to the whole earth!

Mt 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Friends, it is truly good news that we can become standing stones of witness about our mighty God! Please offer yourself as a stone of witness to all, remembering this good news come to you on its way out to someone else, using you as a messenger!

To those of you who have not yet come to Jesus for salvation, I urge you, please call or come see me as soon as possible, so we can have that life and death conversation.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for accomplishing for us that which we are completely incapable of doing ourselves. We cannot save ourselves from our sins. Thank you for Your mercy and grace to us. May we be bold stones of witness to those who do not yet know You.

Amen

**And now:**

**Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Go in peace.**