

“WADING WITH FAITH”

Pastor Mike Corwin

5TH SUNDAY OF LENT

TEXT: HEBREWS 11:1-3

GOD’S WORD: JOSHUA 3:1-17

I – FISHING:

I don’t get the time to enjoy it as I should but my sport of choice is fishing. I’m not built for speed and agility so things like volleyball are out of my reach. My aim isn’t so good so I don’t engage in dart ball. I enjoy golf as I walk around the course until I have to actually put the little white ball in the little hole, then it gets a little frustrating. Fishing allows me to go at my own pace and only compete with the fish, who can’t tell you if I did good or not, so you have to believe my stories.

One of the reasons I enjoy fishing is the solitude I get and the time I get to soak in God’s creation around me. I think that’s why I fish the way I do. I don’t have a boat and don’t really enjoy boat fishing. My style of choice is to stand in the middle of a river with a pair of waders on with the water up to my waist. It’s there I feel the power of God in the current of the water, the artistry of God as I see the trees and rocks and other scenery, and the majesty of God as I watch hawks and eagles scream overhead as well as the other wild life that shares the river with me. I get close to God as I soak it all in and enjoy the solitude of being alone with him in his creation.

It’s also a wonderful way to understand faith a little better. To get to the middle of the river you have to wade. Trouble is you can’t see the bottom. You don’t know whether there’s a mossy rock to step on and slip, or a hole in the riverbed you’ll fall into and get soaked or drowned. You slide your feet along having faith you’ll discover and avoid any obstacles and make it safely to where you want to be. You are wading with faith trusting what you can’t see.

II – JOSHUA’S FAITH:

Can you image for a moment the faith the priests had on the day the Israelites crossed the Jordan River? God had brought his people out of slavery in Egypt and their faith was so little they got themselves in trouble and ended up wandering in the desert with Moses for the next 40 years. During that time the unfaithful generation died off and Moses brought the new generation up to be faithful and obey God. Moses led them to the verge of the Promised Land and died. Before he

died he turned leadership over to his second in command, Joshua, just as God had instructed him to do.

Joshua spoke with God and God assured him that just as he had been with Moses and helped him lead the people, so he would be with Joshua and continue leading the Israelites into the Promised Land. And finally the day comes to do just that. He prepares the people by telling them to purify themselves, make themselves holy just as their God is Holy because they are about to see the Living God do a miraculous thing as he leads the people into the land of milk and honey as he had promised to do. He says the priests will lead the way and carry the Ark of the Covenant, which represented the presence of God among the people. The people were to stay ½ mile back out of reverence for God, and as the priests took a few steps into the Jordan River they should stop so the people can pass by and through. Trouble is he doesn't tell them how to do that. How to walk into a river at flood stage without drowning!

God tells them how later. He says to tell the priests to just step off into the water and it will stop and allow them to pass. Now comes the faith! The passage says that it was the harvest season and the Jordan was overflowing its banks as it did every harvest season. That means the river was now 90-100 feet wide and about 10 feet deep. It wasn't flowing gently but would have been fast moving and turbulent like the rivers around here get when they're flooding. And God says to just have the priests step into the river and it will stop. They can't see the bottom, they can't see any dam so God can stop the river, but they are supposed to wade out in faith. To step out blindly and trust that God will do what he says he will do. Could you do it? Could you step out in faith, wade into the water and trust that it would stop? Do you have that kind of faith?

Evidently the priests did because they did what Joshua told them to do. They stepped out, carrying the Ark of the Covenant on their shoulders, and the water stopped just as God said it would do. They stepped in, the water stopped upstream, and they stood there on dry ground until everyone crossed over and entered the Promised Land. Wading with Faith resulted in God's action.

III – TEXT – HEBREWS 11:1-3:

This theological fact that our faith is based on things we cannot see is repeated in the New Testament as well. This morning's text gives us a definition of faith that explains it this way...

Hebrews 11:1-3 (NLT)

¹Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see. ²Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation. ³By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God's command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen.

These verses start what's been called the "Faith Chapter" of the Bible. It gives us the significant features of this thing called Faith.

It lets us know that faith is a living thing; it's a way of life. Faith gives us a future – as a matter of fact it deals mostly with the future. Faith is what allows us to be sure that the promises made to us by God and his Son, as contained in this book will someday take place.

Faith exceeds our human senses. Faith believes in the things we cannot feel, taste, hear, smell, or experience in any way with our human senses. Matter of fact, it's faith that allows us to believe it all came from God. Faith exceeds all things earthly and allows us to believe in the supernatural.

The rest of the chapter goes on to give you example after example of our Biblical ancestors who pleased God and accomplished great things through their faith. It names people who followed God and became the examples of our faith:

- Abel
- Enoch
- Noah
- Abraham
- Sarah
- Isaac
- Joseph
- Moses
- Rahab
- David
- And more

IV – FAITH SIMPLIFIED:

Let me see if I can make it even simpler for you this morning.

I have faith. I wasn't there to see Jesus perform miracles or listen to his preaching or teaching, yet I believe he did it all. I wasn't there to witness how he spread the love of God in a real and compassionate way on the people who came to him for help, yet I believe he did. I wasn't there to witness the parade on Palm Sunday, yet I know it happened, nor was I there to take part in the Last Supper, yet I believe it occurred to the point I celebrate it now. I wasn't there when Judas betrayed him in the garden and the temple guard arrested him, but I believe without a doubt it happened. I wasn't there as he was tried before the religious leaders or the Roman curator, but I know it took place. I did not witness the cruelty when they beat him about the head and slapped him during questioning, I wasn't there when they spit on him and mocked him, I wasn't there when they stripped him naked and then beat him until his skin was flayed and you could see the

muscles and bone underneath, but I know it happened and can see it and hear it in my mind and heart today. I wasn't there as they put a crown of thorns on his head and punctured his skin with it, but I know he wore one. I wasn't there when they marched him up a hill carrying his own cross and beating him all the way to Golgotha, but it makes me cringe today. I wasn't there when they laid him on the cross and drove iron spikes into his hands and feet and then lifted him into the air between the two criminals but I can hear his pain, hear the metal hammer striking the spikes, and hear the crying of his mother and the other women at the bottom of the cross, and I wasn't there when the sky became black and the earth shook as he breathed his last and died with my sins on his soul. I wasn't an eye witness to any of it, but yet I know without a doubt that he did it for you and for me, I believe it; I have faith that it happened.

And my faith carries through to the fact that I believe that three days later the stone was rolled away from the entrance to his tomb and he stepped out proving that resurrection was real, that sin and death had no more power over God's creation, and because I believe, because I have faith, one day I will be resurrected too! That is faith, believing in what's already been done for you, and believing in what's going to be done for you, even though you can't see it.

V - WADING WITH FAITH:

The question for the day is just as simple as the explanation...do you believe? Do you have Faith? Do you believe that God sent his one and only Son to die so that you could be forgiven of your sins, and do you believe that when you make him your Lord and Savior, you too will share in the resurrection and have eternal life? If so then you have the faith that made Moses and Abraham and Joseph and Jacob and all our Biblical ancestors the righteous children of God we're told they were.

This is the faith that allows you to wade through the water of life with faith that God will get you through anything. To wade through life knowing that God will help you around the holes and hazards in the river of life and if you do fall he will help you back up and dry you off. It's knowing that even if the worst happens, even if you drown your life doesn't end there, but goes on for all of eternity in the presence of the object of our faith, God and Jesus.

How are you walking in the river? Are you standing on the bank, dipping your toes to see if it's safe, or are you in the river fully wading with faith? I pray you have put on the waders of faith and you're standing in the middle with God!

AMEN