

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
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Laura Crosby  
Faith That Crosses Over | Joshua 3 & 4**

Well, it's New Year's Day in Minnesota, but I want to invite you to travel back with me to March 11, 2012. John and I are in Israel and we are ready to cross the border into Jordan. The place where we are is a rather remote border crossing. It's sunny, it's dry, it's dusty. There's a small building there that we have to go in to jump through several bureaucratic hoops. It seems like we fill out the same form six different times, and then we're told that we're supposed to go outside to a certain place and wait for a bus to come, to drive us 100 yards through no-man's-land into Jordan. So, we go outside and we stand. There are very few people around and nobody speaks English. There are no signs, there are no officials, there's no indication of a bus or when a bus might come, we see nothing. We can see where we're supposed to go, but nothing more than that. Well, in the absence of any authority, or direction, or timetable, John decides that he is going to take his roller suitcase and walk through no-man's-land across the border into Jordan. Now, keep in mind this is your Senior Pastor. This is a man known for his wisdom, for his intellect, for his leadership ability, so raise your hand . . . how many of you would have followed John through no-man's-land? In the service last night we also had people who said, "Yes!" Alright. How many of you, like me, are a bit more of a rule follower when it comes to international crossings and tension and would have waited behind? Yeah! Well, if you chose to stay with me, you chose wisely grasshopper, because John had only gone a few yards when a soldier seemingly appeared out of nowhere with a very large very automatic gun trained at John. Now, I tell you that story because we all have Jordan crossing moments.

We are all, today, crossing over into 2017 and I think we could use a little bit of help. Now, we might look to John and learn from his lack of following directions, but I think a better idea is for us to learn from Joshua who crossed over the Jordan River in about the same place that John and I were. Remember, Joshua has wandered in the wilderness with the Israelites, he has taken over Moses' place, and now they're ready to cross into what is now Israel, into the Promised Land. So, at the end of 2016 you may feel a little bit like your route has been like that of the Israelites. Maybe wandering a little bit in circles, a little bit confused, a little bit impatient or anxious to actually get somewhere... to cross over. I love it that the Bible is full of examples of both literal and figurative crossings. Remember, God calls Abraham to leave his country and cross over into a new land. Ruth leaves her home to cross over into Bethlehem with Naomi. Esther crosses over into palace living and Mordechai says, "Perhaps you have crossed over for just such a time as this." Mary and Joseph are called to leave and cross over into Egypt when they are being threatened by Herod after Jesus is born, and Jesus Himself calls us to cross cultural borders and follow Him.

So, how are you feeling about crossing over into 2017? Maybe you feel like this (shows

slide). What are you afraid of maybe? What are you excited about? Do you have bitterness that you might be carrying with you? Do you feel determined like this little duck? Are you confused? Or maybe you feel prepared and resolved for anything that 2017 will bring. So, I want us to ask—what kind of faith might be needed for us as we cross over into 2017?

I want to give you a little context for the Book of Joshua, and then we're going to focus on chapters three and four. I want to say I'm indebted to Steven Furtick for some of his insights into the Book of Joshua. Now, remember the Israelites have been to this border before with Moses, but they had been told they couldn't go into the Promised Land because of Moses's disobedience and their lack of faith. They get there and God says, *hold it. Do not pass go. Do not collect \$200. You need to go back and wander in the wilderness until you're ready to trust Me*, right? And nobody from this generation is going to get to cross over into the Promised Land except Caleb and Joshua. So now they've wandered for forty years and they're back at the banks of the Jordan River. Briefly, we can see that Joshua 1 is a chapter of inspiration. Many of you have probably memorized Joshua 1:9.

<sup>9</sup> Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

Chapter 1 of Joshua is a chapter of inspiration; chapter 2 is a chapter of investigation. Joshua sends spies into the land. He learned from the past to choose wisely, and then the spies come back and say, "The Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands." Now note, remember the first time they had sent spies into the land and they came back scared . . . most of them. These spies came back and they saw their God as bigger than their enemies. The first time the spies saw their enemies as bigger than their God; they've learned their lesson. So, inspiration, investigation. Joshua 3 is a chapter of instruction. Joshua says to the Israelites, *get ready, consecrate yourself*, and then God says:

<sup>12</sup> Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. <sup>13</sup> 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 in a heap. [Joshua 3:12-13]

Then, Joshua 4 is a chapter of insight. When they're done crossing, God has them go back, get 12 stones, pull them out, and put them in a pile.

<sup>21</sup> He said to the Israelites, "In the future when your descendants ask their parents, 'What do these stones mean?' <sup>22</sup> tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.' <sup>24</sup> He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might fear the LORD your God. [Joshua 4:21, 24]

Now, as I read over just chapters 3 and 4, about ten different times I see iterations of crossing over or cross over. We're all often in stages of transition where we're called to cross over, but we don't all cross over well. We can get stuck in some of these stages. For example, we might be inspired, but afraid to cross over. We might investigate, but not cross over well. We can receive instruction, but not cross over well. Now, when John and I crossed into Jordan, John was inspired and he wanted to investigate, but he didn't follow instructions very well. I would also say if you have wandered in the wilderness some in 2016, you may more deeply appreciate some of what the Israelites may have felt on this border. Maybe relief, maybe uncertainty, maybe fear. I think of friends who could have easily given up this year. Teresa and Tom, Susan, Patty, Andy. Many of you may have wanted to give up in your wilderness this year, but you've made it. You've made it.

John read a quote to me this morning from Bob Goff who said, "God hasn't brought you this far and now forgotten your name." Whatever 2016 held for you, God held you also, and whatever 2017 holds, God will hold you in 2017.

So now what? What can we learn from Joshua's crossing? Here he is at the bank of the Jordan River, ready to cross over and verse 3:15 says that the Jordan River is at flood stage, so it's intimidating. It takes faith to cross over into waters of uncertainty. Also, it's not like the Israelites are crossing over onto easy street, right? All of the enemies that were there forty years ago are still there—remember all the "ites"? The Amorites, the Hittites, the Parasites? All of those "ites" are still there waiting for them. Now, we may not have a choice whether to cross over into 2017, but we have a choice of *how* we're going to cross over.

So, I want to look at four takeaways about crossing over. First of all, crossing over takes a faith that looks forward. A faith that looks forward, and I put these glasses up here to remind us of that. In Joshua 3 it says:

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been that way before. [Joshua 3:3-4]

The ark of the covenant represents God's presence going before. We need to look forward to God's presence in leading us, and sometimes it is tempting to just camp on the banks of the Jordan and look backwards. To kind of sit in our sadness if you will, but we need to be careful not to let looking at what's behind us keeping us from seeing what's in front of us, right?

My brother died a year-and-a-half ago and last Christmas was my sister-in-law Susan's first Christmas without him. She said that really she just wanted to get through it. She

really wanted to sleep through Christmas and just get to the other side. She wanted to curl up on the banks of the Jordan, sit in her sadness, and look back at all the good times she had with my brother. This year she said she felt similarly. Anytime she heard Christmas carols she would cry, and the temptation was still to look back instead of looking forward. Yet, she realized that her boys, her sons, will have families of their own and they will want to celebrate new traditions, and so she fixed her eyes on God and worked at moving forward. It's not like she forgot what was behind, but she looked forward in faith. Crossing over takes a faith that looks forward.

Second of all, crossing over takes a faith that stands with us in the middle. In Joshua 3 it says:

<sup>17</sup> 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. [Joshua 3:17]

Again, the arc represents God's presence. God is with us in the middle of us our mess, in the middle of the Jordan as we cross over. We have a 360 degree God. He goes behind us, He goes before us, and His Holy Spirit indwells us so He is with us. I want you to imagine yourself standing in the middle of the Jordan. Maybe there is a mess that you envision in your life right now. I want you to imagine standing in the middle of that mess and God with you, and He says *no matter how messy it gets I will never leave you. I will guide you. He says I will forgive you. He says I will strengthen you. I will stand with you in the middle.* So crossing over takes a faith that stands with us in the middle.

Thirdly, I would say that crossing over takes a faith that carries something out. It carries something out. Remember in Joshua 4 it says:

<sup>2</sup> Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe,<sup>3</sup> 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. [Joshua 4:2-3]

He sends them back and I believe that God wants us to carry out something with us from the Jordan. I think He wants us to bring with us maybe perspective, maybe increased faith, maybe perseverance. If you look back over the past twelve months, what is it that God might call you to carry out? Now, as I'm thinking about this walking through the water, I was thinking about Isaiah 43:2. It says:

<sup>2</sup> When you pass through the waters, I will be with you [okay]; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you [okay]. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

I can imagine some of you may be thinking, *wow, I sure feel like I've been burned in 2016*, but I think there's a difference. I was thinking about this and I think there is a

difference between a destructive fire that consumes us and a refining fire that God uses to refine us and make us more like Him. So as you look back over the last 12 months, what are you taking out of the Jordan? What has God maybe used to refine you? There may be things that might have felt like a millstone that God wants you to use as a stepping stone. There might have been things that felt like a stumbling block that God is actually going to use as a building block in your life. So think about that. Is there something that you've been tripping over that God might want you to triumph over—that He wants you to take out and use for good?

The last thing that I see in this is that crossing over takes a faith that points back to God. It looks forward, but it points back to God's faithfulness. Chapter 4 verse 21 says:

<sup>21</sup> He said to the Israelites, "In the future when your descendants ask their parents, 'What do these stones mean?' <sup>22</sup> tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.'" <sup>24</sup> He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God. [Joshua 4:21-22, 24]

Now, think of all the things that the Israelites could have pointed to. They could have pointed to their misery, but God wanted them to point to miracles. They could have pointed to failure, but God wanted them to point to His faithfulness. So think about what reminders you might have—in your life, in your home, at your office—that point back to God's faithfulness. Maybe it's a picture that you keep on your desk, maybe it's an object, or it might be a journal entry. John and I look back over our journal entries every year about this time and we highlight the different things that we feel like God has helped us to bring out of 2016—the things that we've learned—and we also highlight instances of God's faithfulness, so it might be looking back at a journal entry. It might be an object like I said. I wanted to share . . . this is something that my friend gave me this Christmas and it is so meaningful. Every time I look at it I will think of God's redemptive power and His faithfulness. This was made by women in Uganda who are given a small loan, and they made this out of the horns from cattle and then sold them to make a living. This to me reminds me of how God can take something ordinary and redeem it and make it something beautiful. My friend wrote this to me. She said, "It reminds me of our mighty King melting, molding, and polishing to make a new thing that He has promised. So as I look at this, I will look back to God's faithfulness in melting, molding, and polishing me.

Gracious, heavenly Father. We thank You that You are with us as we cross over into 2017. Lord, for some of us, it's hard or sad to look forward and we want to look back and just grieve. As much as you hold us, as You do that I pray that You would also help us look forward to where You go ahead of us. There are others of us feeling like we're standing in the messy middle. Things are confusing; we may feel stuck in a pattern of sin or addiction. Thank You that You stand with us in that middle, that You strengthen us. For some of us, 2016 has been a year of growth and maybe challenges and we're looking to You to help us understand

what You want us to take out, to take with us into 2017. Help us to celebrate the ways that we have been strengthened and grown by You. Lastly Lord, we thank You for Your faithfulness—when we recognized it and when we didn't. We pray that You would help us to point back to You...You who are always faithful, always present, and always strong. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.