

Date: February 16, 2020
Series: *Joshua: A Call to Faith*
Title: *God Can Do It Again!*
Preacher: Mark Adams
Scripture: Joshua 3:1-4:9

Do you remember the Tom Hanks movie, *That Thing You Do?* It came out in 1996 and told the story of a fictional “one-hit-wonder” band ironically named “*The Oneders*,” pronounced “*Wonders*.” The band was not really going anywhere until their regular drummer broke his arm trying to jump over a parking meter. They got a new drummer named Guy and his unique “beat” transformed one of their songs, “*That Thing You Do*” into an instant hit. Tom Hanks’ character hears their song and agrees to become their manager. With his help the song gets a lot of airtime on the radio; the band’s fame soars, they become an overnight teen sensation, but the problem is they can’t come up with another hit. It turns out “*That Thing You Do*” is the only thing they can do and eventually the band dissolves.

The film is inspired by the real stories of hundreds of “one-hit-wonder” bands like:

- The Baha Men who came out with “*Who Let the Dogs Out?*” and
- Bobby McFarrin’s “*Don’t Worry, Be Happy.*” and
- Los Del Rio’s “*Macarena.*”

These musicians did something very popular musically but they apparently didn’t have enough talent to repeat it---they couldn’t do it again.

We come to a chapter in Joshua where the Hebrews probably wondered something like that about God. Can He do it again?

Let me give you the setting.

God’s chosen people are encamped at Shittim on the Western side of the Jordan river. Joshua sent two spies to cross the river to do some recon on the walled city of Jericho. The King of Jericho learned that the spies were in his city, but as Pam told us a couple weeks ago, with the help of Rahab they were able to escape and make their way back to Shittim. They tell Joshua, “***The Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us.***” (Joshua 2:24) So with this recon report, the Hebrews are about to go into battle---the first of many they will wage---in order to claim the Promised Land.

Now, remember, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, this group of Hebrews were not alive when the Exodus from Egypt began. For their entire lives, these guys had been told of God’s parting the Red Sea, but they hadn’t seen it because they hadn’t been born yet. Oh, they’ve heard the stories but they didn’t actually see it happen. And now another body of water---a raging river---lies between them and the Promised Land. By the time they are ready to cross, the Jordan is at flood stage, which means it was a mile wide with a swift, dangerous current. The question on their minds is: “*Can God get us across safely? “God parted the Red Sea---can He do it again---or is God just a “one-hit wonder?”*”

With that in mind, take your Bibles and turn to Joshua chapter 3. And if able, I would ask that you stand in respect for God’s Word as it is read. We’re starting in Joshua 3 verse 1.

1 – Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over.

2 – After three days the officers went throughout the camp,

- 3 – giving orders to the people: “When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God---and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it.**
- 4 – Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it.”**
- 5 – Joshua told the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.”**
- 6 – Joshua said to the priests, “Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people.” So, they took it up and went ahead of them.**
- 7 – And the LORD said to Joshua, “Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses.**
- 8 – Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: ‘When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river.’”**
- 9 – Joshua said to the Israelites, “Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God.**
- 10 – This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that He will certainly drive out before you: the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites.**
- 11 – See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you.**
- 12 – Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe.**
- 13 – 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 up in a heap.”**
- 14 – So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them.**
- 15 – Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water’s edge,**
- 16 – the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So, the people crossed over opposite Jericho.**
- 17 – The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.**

One thing I want us to remember this morning is that the Christian life is a journey. God didn’t just save us; He saved us for a purpose. He saved us to conform us to the image of His Son. He saved us to mature us and equip us to do His will. He saved us to teach us how to be His flesh in this world. I mean, there is more to this Christianity thing than just being delivered from bondage to sin.

I’m saying that like the delivered Hebrew people in this text, each of us has a rich inheritance to cross over and claim as God’s people. In Deuteronomy 6:23 Moses told the Hebrews, **“God BROUGHT US OUT from here [Egypt] in order to BRING US IN, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers.”**

Well, God brought you and me out of sin to take us from where we are to where we need to be. Salvation is just the beginning. As someone put it, *“The Christian life is a journey, not an arrival.”* Joshua’s words in chapter 13 apply to us: **“There remains much ‘land’ to be possessed.”** (Joshua 13:1) I mean, as children of God we have a long way to go, there’s a lot of spiritual “property” to be claimed! And making that journey, claiming that “property,” requires faith. This journey we are all on---a journey toward fulfillment and abundance in our walk with God involves lots of times when we trust Him to do it again---times when we have FAITH that God will work miraculously---just as He has done in the past when He saved us from our sin.

And I would remind you that, for a church, this caliber of FAITH is essential. Trusting God to do God-sized things is required if our church is to be healthy. As I said in the vision sermon a couple months ago, doing things that require faith; even though it’s hard, even though we struggle, those faith steps protect us from the

dangers that come with doing things the easy way. It's wrong---fatal in fact---for a church to just play it safe. Without faith we can do nothing for God; so, without it our church would shrivel up and die. God needs His church to be a place of faith where people brave the "rapids of doing His will."

In fact, the life and destiny of many congregations like ours often comes down to a few critical decisions at "crossing points" like the Hebrews faced here. When something requires faith, those church families who decide to move on toward in dependency on His intervention experience glorious victory---just like the Hebrew people did in this text. But other churches come to the "riverbank of their own peculiar Jordan" and they retreat. They opt for the safety of predictability rather than the adventure of crossing over and because they do their church remains small and ineffective.

I can't help but think of the church my dad pastored in Dover. There was land for sale; land adjoining the church property. Dad tried to get them to buy it several times, but the church said "no." They said they couldn't afford it. Dad said you can't afford NOT to buy it, that eventually they would need it. But the church said no. And today a Mosque has been built on that land. Isn't that sad?

So, this text deals with much more than ancient history, the amazing things God did thousands of years ago for the Jews. No, this story is included in God's book because it has implications for both your individual lives and our corporate life as a church family. These verses contain a challenge as to what God wants to do even if, especially if, it is beyond our ability. And we must learn to accept this challenge---we must learn to trust God to "do it again"---because in the Christian life you're either an over-comer or you're overcome. You're a victor or a victim. And many times, the determining factor is whether or not you obey God and embrace the faith to "cross-over!"

So in the coming year, when God says, "*As a family I want you to decide to trust Me and in addition to your tithe---I want you to set aside something extra for the ROC debt.*" When God says that, your response; your decision to cross over financially, will require faith. If God tells a group of Grace-Group Attenders, "*Hey it's time to leave the comfort of your group and start a NEW group so that more people can study the Bible. There are other people I've gifted to teach My Word.*" When God says that, your response; your decision to cross over, will require faith. If God tells you to have a faith conversation with a co-worker, that decision will require faith, faith that God goes before you in those kinds of discussions. I could go on but you get the idea. I believe that, in the same way that God commanded the Hebrew people to trust Him and cross the Jordan, He is commanding each of us to trust Him and work to achieve these BHAF goals He has given us.

And I must say that if Satan's attacks are any indication that we are following God's will then these goals definitely qualify---because the adversary has been very active these past few weeks trying to discourage us.

The question for us as individuals and as a church is: How will we respond to when God calls us to do something scary, something beyond our ability? Will we stay where we are, out in the "desert" so to speak and be content on this "shore" or will we take that step of faith and cross over to the abundant exciting life God calls us to? That brings us to this morning's question: "*Where do we get this caliber of faith? Where do we get the faith to do God-sized things? Where do we get the faith to believe God can do it again?*" Let's look to the example of the Hebrew people here for answers to these questions.

(1) First, their experience tells us when faith is required, we must EXAMININE OURSELVES.

Each of us needs to evaluate how close we are to God, how we are doing when it comes to listening to His still, small voice. The word Joshua uses here is "**consecration.**" Look at verse 5. "**Joshua told the people, 'Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.'**" The word "consecrate" here literally means "separated to" or "belonging to God." You see, one reason Joshua issued this command

was to remind the Hebrews both who and whose they were. By the way, this isn't the first time the Hebrew people had been given this command. In Exodus 19 prior to their receiving the Ten Commandments God said to Moses, ***“Go to the people tomorrow and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.”***

Here in Joshua the people were to once again cleanse themselves physically. Of course, life in the desert involved learning to do without water. So, bathing and doing laundry was not something you did that often. And this atypical, outward act---this outward cleansing---was a way of reminding the people of the inward cleansing we all need before we can come into the presence of our Holy God. We need to EXAMINE ourselves and repent of our sinful actions and attitudes.

When we were in Kenya on a mission trip a few years ago, on the first Sunday, Cathie Burke took us to visit an orphanage run by Faith Waziri. Most of you have heard us talk about Faith and her work with the abandoned children of Kenya. Faith Waziri has “crossed over” in obedience to God countless times! Well, it was about an hour drive to the orphanage along the dirty streets of the outskirts of Nairobi. As we rode along the busy streets we saw cows begin driven down side to find pasture; they helped keep the “red dust” of Nairobi stirred up, that dust that seemed to coat everything. But, I also saw people walking to church. They stood out because they were wearing their “Sunday best.” They had obviously bathed and dressed. Their clothes were clean and colorful---a stark contrast to the dirt around them. They had done this because they knew they were coming into God's presence in worship. We do the same thing here---we put on our “Sunday best” to remind ourselves that this is literally a reverent time, a holy time a time for us to come into God's holy presence and offer Him our lives. This Sunday custom should help us to remember that as God says in Leviticus 19:2, ***“You must be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy.”***

In my mind this is an illustration of the fact that to be the people of God, every day we must decide to leave behind the sin of the world and strive for purity and holiness. Christians should live “set-apart-to-God lives.” We are to live in such a way that people can clearly see we are different from this fallen world. We are to live so that people can see who we are and whose we are. When we sin, we confess and ask God to cleanse us.

Listen, when God commands us to do something big---one way we get the faith to do so is to take time to withdraw from the world's influence through meditation and prayer. In this time we confess known sin so that we can clearly hear God's voice, clearly distinguish His will. We repent and recommit ourselves to God. We need to do this because if there was ever a time when we need close fellowship with God, it's at these crossing times of life. It is in these times that we desperately need God's guidance. We need Him to fulfill His promise in Psalm 32:8 where He says, ***“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go.”***

North of Atlanta there's an intersection where two major highways come together: I-285 and I-85. This monstrosity of twentieth century engineering spans several miles and includes a glut of overpasses and exit ramps. Even if you've driven over, under, and through the interchanges hundreds of times, you still have to pay attention, or you'll start veering off course. Years ago, when the interchange first opened, a local radio station held a contest to nickname the massive tangle of concrete and steel. The name that stuck was “Spaghetti Junction.” When you look at it from the sky, the name is certainly fitting as you can see. It's actually a very efficient traffic hub---unless you happen to be passing through between 4:00-6:00 PM. During this time of the day, Spaghetti Junction becomes a multilane parking lot. Everything comes to a standstill. All hopes of being home for dinner, early for a ballgame, or on time for a meeting are dashed. Just about everyone in the Atlanta metropolitan area has, at one time or another, driven into Spaghetti Junction with a smile on their face and a song in their heart---only to find themselves driving out an hour later with vision of selling everything they own and moving to the country.

The good news is that everyone eventually makes it out. The bad news is that, few people come out with the same attitude they went in with.

Well, our hearts can become like a hub like Spaghetti Junction at rush hour. Everything we experience in life gets channeled through our hearts, including sinful thoughts and attitudes and behaviors. The problem is they have a tendency to get stuck there. And when they do, they block our fellowship with God. So, before we cross over, we need to clean it out. We need to examine ourselves and confess our sins. We need to clear up the "traffic jam" so nothing blocks us from God. Remember as 1st John 1:5-7 says, ***"This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light---and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."*** The fact is we can't have the close fellowship with God that we so desperately need at times like this and at the same time willfully disobey His law. So, we need this time of examination.

We need to ask God to examine our motives so that we are sure we are crossing for the right reason and in the right way. We need to pray as David prayed in Psalm 139:23, ***"Search me, O God, and know my heart...see if there is any offensive way in me-then lead me in the way everlasting."*** So, before God will work His wonder-working power in us---power we will need to make this and any crossing---we must first consecrate ourselves---examine ourselves.

(2) Next, we must take a few moments to EXAMINE GOD

We must "look at" WHO God is---remember His attributes---His unlimited power and knowledge and love. This perspective gives us the courage---the faith---to attempt God-sized things. This is important because the fact is, we will never make faith crossings on our own. God goes with us---He parts the waters. Only God can make God-sized things possible. We find this principle in our text because the people were instructed to follow The Ark of God. What did it look like? Well, if you've seen the first Indiana Jones movie then you have a fairly accurate understanding of the size of the ark because they got that part right. It was 2 feet by 2 feet by 4 feet, covered in gold with two cherubs facing each other on the top. The Ark contained the Ten Commandments carved in stone that had been given to Moses at Mount Sinai. It also held the entire Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament as well as a jar of manna to remind the people that for 40 days God had met their physical needs. And basically, the ark symbolized God's presence among His people. It was seen as the "portable throne" of the invisible God. And, the people were to follow it. Joshua didn't say, *"Follow us, men."* like some John Wayne movie. No, he said, *"Follow God!"*

Verse 15 of chapter 3 tells us that when the Hebrews arrived at the shore of the Jordan they saw that it was at flood stage. Usually it was not much more than a babbling brook but by the time the Hebrew Nation prepared to cross, with spring rains and melting snows from the mountains of Lebanon, it would have been a raging torrent a mile or more wide. God did promise to part the water as He had done the Red Sea forty years earlier. He promised to do it again, but this time it would be different. Forty years earlier, Moses had stretched out his staff and the water had parted and they had walked across on dry land. This time there would be no staff-induced pre-parting. Instead, the water would part only when the priest took that first step, a literal step of faith.

Can you imagine how that priest felt with his foot about to plunge into that torrent? Well, they were to do this, they were to take this step not by looking down at the water but by looking to God. They were to focus on The Ark, so as to remind them of God's powerful presence. And in whenever faith requires us to make a crossing like this, we must do the same thing. We must keep our eyes on Jesus, the Author and perfecter of our faith. God is still in the "water-parting business." And when in obedience we step forward, God always enables. It requires us to look to God. Only then can we take that step of faith. Often only after we make this step of faith do we feel our feet touch solid, dry "ground."

Only after we look to God in obedience do we experience God's provision and power. This reminds me of something Brother Andrew once said, *"The great thing about obedience is seeing what God had in mind."*

This week I read about a 15-year-old girl named Lois Secrist. In 1927, Lois promised God she'd go overseas as a missionary, perhaps to Africa or India, helping the needy. But Lois never made that trip of mercy because at 23 she married Galon Prater, a handsome farmhand. When he died January 9, 1988, Lois's childhood desire of becoming a missionary returned. At first, she resisted. At age 76, she felt her opportunity to serve overseas as a missionary had slipped away. Lois admits, *"I said, 'Lord, I'm too old to go now. I can't do this,'"* But this great grandmother was determined to fulfill her unforgotten promise. Lois, pricked by the memory of ignoring God's calling as a teenager, would not refuse a second chance at becoming a missionary.

So, at 87, Lois Prater has become the unlikely builder of an orphanage in the Philippines, a lifeline to 35 children whose lives have been rescued from neglect, begging in the streets, and parental abuse. Today the 35 orphans living in the two-story, 2,000 square foot white stucco home call Lois *"Lola,"* which means *"grandmother"* in their native Tagalog language. Lois's *"children,"* as she calls them, range in age from eight months to 10 years. Each of their stories is heartbreaking. Lois has built the orphanage without taking out a loan, relying instead on individual financial support from across the United States. Because of her age, she is not supported by any church denomination and depends solely on private donations. When asked if that makes her nervous, she says confidently, *"I serve a mighty God. He's in control. I'm not talented enough to do any of this."* God called and Lois obeyed, trusting Him to make the impossible---possible.

(3) That leads us to the third step. We must examine the PAST.

We must look back so that we can see that God has always helped us make the crossings of life. I mean, Joshua's faith here was based on previous experience with God. He'd seen Him part the Red Sea so he had faith to cross the Jordan. I'm sure that story from the past helped the current Hebrews. No doubt the account of that crossing had been told over campfires for 40 years as they wandered in the desert and that memory---that "look back" gave the people the faith to step out and claim the Promised Land.

Well, our faith steps in the crossings of life are made in the same way. We look back at what God has done and this look back gives us the faith to step out. Some people think that faith is a leap in the darkness but this is not true. No, we trust and obey God because experience has taught us that He is trust worthy!

In my office I have all kinds of reminders of God's faithfulness to me in the past. For example, I have this picture, taken the day of my graduation from seminary, and it reminds me that God got Sue and me through those three years. He provided the finances to pay for my studies and food and rent money and car payments. He gave us great friends, lifelong friends. He provided wonderful professors who taught me so much. He gave me a great church to "cut my ministerial teeth" on. I also keep this tract. It's *Steps to Peace With God* in Spanish and I keep it because it reminds me of our mission trip to Saltillo, Mexico. We were driving from Harlingen, Texas in four vans and there were several check points along the way, where you had to stop and show your papers before going on. At one of these stops the inspectors insisted we open one of our suitcases. Of all the dozens of pieces of luggage, they "happened" to choose the one that was full of nothing but these tracts. Opening it gave us an opportunity to share our faith with him. So, I keep this tract because it reminds me that God went before us in that time of crossing deeper into Mexico. One more. In the top drawer of my desk I keep this diaper, this tiny diaper. It belonged to Noah Aune, one of the children born to former Redlanders Greg and Christie Aune. Noah was a twin. He and his sister Emma were born prematurely. They were soooo small. Emma weighed a little over 2 pounds and Noah weighed about a pound and a half. Greg could put his wedding ring all the way up Noah's arm. I've never seen a human being so tiny! I will never forget the day I visited and Noah was out of the incubator for the first time.

Someone took his picture and his tiny eyes squinted. That little baby, so small I could have held him in the palm of my hand, responded to our talking to him. And I keep his diaper to remind me of God's power displayed in bringing those little children home to their loving parents. I also keep it to remind me how precious human life is at every stage of development.

Well, any successful crossing grows out of history like this because we can look back and remember that as Isaac Watts said in his great hymn text, *"Oh God our help in ages past---our HOPE for years to come; our shelter from the stormy blast and our eternal home."*

So, to summarize, this text can teach us that when we come to the faith required to do God-sized things.

We must EXAMINE ourselves. We must EXAMINE God. We must EXAMINE the past---

(4) And then finally we must EXAMINE THE FUTURE

We need to remember that our response to God's call when it comes to the crossings of life will influence future generations of believers. They will look to our example when it comes to their own faith challenges. This is why, acting on God's orders, Joshua instructed 12 men---one to represent each tribe of Israel---to each take a stone from the middle of the Jordan before the priests with the ark left and the waters returned. As verses 6-7 say, these stones were to *"...serve as a sign."* Joshua said, *"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."*

We come now to our time of invitation. I feel led to point out that this regular part of our service is in itself a time of faith decisions---times crossing from where we are to where God wants us to be. If you're here and are not a Christian, then I believe that right now Jesus is knocking on your heart's door. He's inviting you to cross over in faith from unbelief to belief, from darkness to light, as you accept Jesus forgiveness for your sin and give Him your life to use as He sees fit. You may be a Christian in need of a church home, and God may be leading you to cross over into membership here and RBC. We'd love to have you! Or you may be facing some insurmountable problem and you need someone to pray with you so you know how to deal with it. I would remind you of the lyrics of that old song,

*Got any rivers you think are uncross-able?
God any mountains you can't tunnel through?
God specializes in things thought impossible.
He does the things others cannot do.*

The words to this song are true. Come; I would love to pray with you. But, however God is leading, cross over into the center of His will.