

## June 28 Worship Transcript

### Welcome and Prayer - Pastor Katherine Goerzen

Welcome. Even though we recognize that we have been worshipping and praying together as a body of believers though we have not been in the same physical space during these past few months, it is such a joy to have an opportunity to gather together for worship on our church grounds.

Welcome. Even though we have been wandering through the unknown wilderness of the global pandemic, we have gathered together to praise the God who journeys with us.

Welcome. Even though we do not know what lies ahead, we remember God's words to Joshua before he and God's people crossed the Jordan River: "Do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh 1:9).

Welcome. It is indeed good to be together in this space.

Before we continue with our worship together, I want to quickly highlight 2 announcements from the bulletin:

- First, there will be a fellowship gathering for people age 50 and older this coming Wednesday beginning at 7:00. Plan to meet here on the east side of the church building. There is additional information in the bulletin for any who are interested.
- Secondly, Western District Conference Annual Assembly will be Aug. 1 & 2. It is online this year, so anyone can join for the workshops and webinars. Also, if anyone is interested in being a delegate for this, please let a pastor know. There is additional information in the bulletin for this as well.

At this time, let us join our hearts together in prayer:

God, after so many months of waiting, we thank you for an opportunity to gather together in person in this space. We gather here, at the foot of the cross, set among stones laid by faithful people from this congregation who came before us. May they remind us of your steadfast love and faithfulness as you have journeyed with us in the past and fill us with the assurance that you will continue to be present with us in all that lies ahead. Amen.

*Michelle music*

**Scripture Reading:** Joshua 3:14-4:7 (NIV) - Pastor Phil Schmidt

3:14 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 (that is, the Dead 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 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.

4:1 When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, 2 “Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, 3 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.”

4 So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, 5 and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, 6 to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ 7 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.”

The Word of God for the People of God. ***Thanks Be to God!***

**Sermon:** “What Do These Stones Mean?” — Pastor Phil Schmidt

One of the things I love about being a parent is the opportunity to respond to a variety of questions. My children, like pretty much all children, are curious, asking questions like:

- What does the word “transformation” mean?
- Why is the sky blue?
- Where do bunnies sleep at night?

and so on and so forth.

Some questions are easier to answer than others, but the most important thing for me to remember, for us to remember, is that it isn’t about giving the right answer to every question. One of the most important things for curious children is to know that their question is heard and that it is important. For parents, grandparents, teachers, sponsors, mentors, anyone who receives a question from a child, please try to remember to say “Thank you for that wonderful question!” or “I love your curiosity!” and then respond. Our response might be a simple word, or short phrase, but the best questions lead to telling a story.

In our scripture passage this morning, God’s people have been on quite a journey. Only about 40 years earlier, they were slaves in Egypt, and then God heard their cry for help. God spoke to Moses at the burning bush and sent Moses and Aaron to help set God’s people free. After celebrating the first passover and leaving their lives of slavery, however, the people faced another challenge: the Red Sea was before them and the Egyptian army was behind. What were they to do? Again, God provided a way, and they crossed the Red Sea on dry ground.

They journeyed onward to the mountain where God had met Moses in the burning bush and there they entered into covenant relationship with God. They committed to being God’s people and God committed to being their God. From there, they set out through the wilderness toward the Promised Land, full of hope. But the wilderness was full of difficulty. There wasn’t water or food. The people whined and complained. Then, when they sent spies into the Promised Land, the people were afraid to follow God and wanted to return to Egypt, to their familiar lives of slavery, so God gave them a time out, a very long time out: 40 years of wandering in the wilderness!

Finally, after 40 years in the wilderness, God's people were ready to enter the Promised Land, they were ready to trust God fully in the amazing future that lay ahead. Such an occasion was something to mark in a special way. So God gave the people specific instructions for how they were to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land.

First, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant would walk to the middle of the river. As soon as their feet touched the water, the river stopped flowing and the people crossed the river on dry ground. Then, 12 people, one from each tribe, were sent back to the middle of the river to pick up a stone as a memorial. The stones were a symbol to spark the curiosity of children, so that children would ask "What do these stones mean?" and they could respond with the story of how God had brought them through the Jordan River, and with the bigger story of how God had brought them out of slavery, into covenant relationship, how God was present with God's people and provided for them through the wilderness, and how God faithfully led them into the Promised Land.

"What do these stones mean?" What a great question. What an important question! These stones are a sign of our amazing and faithful God, reminding us to tell the story of God's grace and love again and again. And each time we tell the story, we can add new insights and experiences. Because the story didn't end when the people crossed the Jordan River. The story has continued through the years, through the generations, all the way up to today. And we are part of this amazing story of God and God's people.

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, we have been journeying through a wilderness time in these last months amidst the global coronavirus pandemic. No, it hasn't been 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, but these last 3+ months have felt like a long time, and there is still a lot of uncertainty as to how much longer this pandemic will last. In these months of wilderness wandering through the pandemic, we and people all around the community, country, and world have faced many challenges. Many people lost their jobs or had their hours cut at work. Many people have experienced increased tension, depression, and anxiety amidst this time of isolation, physical distancing, and political turmoil. Many people have grieved the loss of loved ones. In recent weeks, many people have been crying out for justice, declaring that "Black Lives Matter" in a country and system that has too often treated people of color as inferior. Yes, these past weeks and months have been full of tension and turmoil and each of us is engaged in a great struggle through this wilderness time.

And yet, if we have eyes to see and open hearts, we can also recognize that God has been faithfully present with us throughout these last 3+ months. Just as God has been faithfully present with us throughout our lives, throughout our congregation's story, God has continued to journey with us through this pandemic wilderness. Through this time of difficulty, God has inspired many people to creatively give of their time and resources to support the work of Mennonite Central Committee, the New Hope Shelter, the Goessel Community Foundation, the Tabor Food Pantry, and so much more. God has enabled people to reach out to care for one another through phone calls, letters of encouragement, Zoom meetings, porch visits, and more. God has been with our Christian Education Team as they have planned for Summer Faith Formation. God has been with our Church Council as we have processed many decisions, including the opportunity to support a Faith Formation curriculum that will be available this Fall. God has been with us through the digital worship services and through individual faith sharing. God has been with us as we awake to the reality of systemic racial injustice, inspiring several of us to learn more and pursue positive action toward justice. Yes indeed, God has been journeying with us through this difficult time.

And so today we gather in this parking lot to remember and to look ahead. No, we don't know how much longer this pandemic will last, how much more wilderness is in front of us. With rising Covid-19 case numbers in the area, we don't know when we will be ready to meet for in-person worship services in the church building. We don't know what the local schools will look like this Fall. There is so much we don't know. And yet, we can trust that our God, the God of Exodus, the God of Promise, the God revealed most clearly in Jesus, will continue to be with us and guide us through these difficult times.

Therefore, Sisters and Brothers in Christ, let us remember to notice God's presence through these past months and up to today. And let us trust that God will continue to be present with us in the days, weeks, and months to come.

As a symbol of our remembering and our commitment to continue following God, I invite the 12 appointed people to please come forward to stack a stone memorial here on the trailer. This memorial will be a symbol for us, reminding us of the pandemic wilderness, reminding us of God's faithful presence. Following this service, this stone memorial will be moved to an area by the church front doors so that in the coming months, whenever we pass by these stones, we can remember to ask "What do these stones mean?" and we can respond with the story of God's provision and presence through the pandemic. May it be so. Amen.

**Sending Prayer and Blessing:** Pastor Katherine Goerzen



God our Guide and Guardian,

Just as your people couldn't imagine what all would happen after entering into the land of Promise, both the good and the devastating, we too recognize that we do not know what lies ahead and that there are still many storms and trials that lie ahead of us.

Continue to fill us with the assurance that no matter what happens, that you journey with us, through both miraculous and noticeable ways, such as a pillar of fire to guide us, as well as in subtle ways that we may only see in hindsight, such as the still small voice of a companion who journeys beside us.

Amid the fear, the anxiety, and the pain of this world, continue to transform us into "Living Stones" to remind one another of your steadfast faithfulness to us.

And even during the times when it seems as though the wilderness wanderings will go on forever, remind us that you are with us wherever we go, and that we will indeed some day reach the land of promise, when your new creation comes in full.

In your name we pray, Amen.

Receive now these words of blessing, spoken by God to Joshua at the outset of his journey to the land of promise: "Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." Amen. Go in peace.