

Dedication, October 11, 2015  
Joshua 4:19-24  
What Do These Stones Mean?  
Rev. George Ferch

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

It was a long journey for sure. It was a journey begun with both uncertainty and expectation. The journey took longer than it should have on account of failures along the way. I'm speaking of course about Israel's trek from Egypt to the Promised Land not about our building project.

After 40 years and the loss of an entire generation, Joshua directed the Exodus on its final leg from the east bank of the Jordan to Gilgal on the west bank. That river, flooded and surging between its banks with spring waters, was a barrier to the passage.

It would take a miracle to get the 2 million people across. The LORD God provided that miracle. God did not want the people or their children ever to forget. God instructed Joshua to create a memorial of twelve stones.

The Lord God has done a miracle for us. Joshua's namesake has saved us from our sins, and guilt, and death. The Holy Spirit has given us new birth into a life of faith in Jesus Christ. We do not want to forget what God has done. We do not want our children and future generations to forget. We have built a worship center in which are memorials to God's great acts on our behalf.

Applying Joshua's words about his memorial to ours, we ask, **What Do These Stones Mean?** They mean the hand of the LORD is powerful. They mean we always may fear the LORD our God.

Israel spent three days in spiritual preparation before crossing the Jordan. This was not unlike the spiritual preparation we make before we worship. I realize I am a sinner. I trust my Savior. I expect to be amazed as God leads me from earth to heaven in the divine service. I follow his lead. On the eve of worship, we experience the truth of Joshua's command and promise, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you." [3:5]

The people prepared to follow the ark of the covenant as the priests carried it out in front, blazing the path. What amazing thing would the LORD do? When the priests carrying the ark stepped into the Jordan, the Red Sea miracle repeated. The water upstream stopped flowing, and the water downstream continued into the Dead Sea leaving a dry land crossing point of fifteen to twenty five miles.

After the crossing, a member of each tribe did as God commanded. He took a stone out of the riverbed for a memorial. Joshua built that memorial in Gilgal on the west side for future generations. What do these stones mean? "Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground...He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful."

In those stones, the people would see Jesus as God did everything for the sake of keeping his promise. Our stones are the pulpit, the baptismal font, and the altar. In these memorials all the peoples of the earth will see Jesus Christ as the instrument of God's powerful hand for our redemption and our salvation.

From this pulpit, God's called servants of the Word proclaim Jesus Christ. At this font the Holy Spirit kills our flesh and buries us with Christ. Here we rise to enter into a world that knows no end by our union with Christ, his death and his resurrection. With this altar we remember the altar of the cross on which the Father sacrificed his only-begotten Son as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. On it we place the bread and wine we use to receive his true body and blood in the foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

As we consecrate ourselves as the community of saints and ambassadors for Christ, we do so in this context; the hand of the LORD is powerful. God's powerful hand has delivered us from the slavery of our sins. That hand provides and protects as we travel across the desert of our earthly time of grace. The LORD's hand is powerful to hold us secure as we pass through physical death into eternal life.

What could hold us back? What could prevent us from encouraging and strengthening one another as we carry out Christ's Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations? What do these stones mean? They mean Jesus. They stand as a memorial for us and for future generations lest we forget who we are by God's grace and why we are here as a visible body in Christ. In this way, those stones also mean we may always fear the LORD our God.

Those who crossed the Jordan on dry ground would look at Joshua's 12 stone memorial and know that everything was good. Soon the nation would set out to take possession of the land as the instruments of God's judgment against Canaanite idolatry. The peoples of the earth would know the power of the Lord's hand. His people would know they could continue to fear the LORD. They would know their faith in the LORD God was not misplaced. They would continue to see that the object of all the LORD did for them was to keep his promise of the coming Savior. What else does "fear the LORD" mean besides humbling self and exalting Jesus Christ? Israel did that by believing in the future God had in store for them. We do it by believing what God has done for us in the past on Calvary, and believing what he will do for us when Christ returns in glory.

The ark of the covenant led the people and they followed it to safety and the possession of God's promises. Our ark of the covenant is the gospel of Jesus Christ in the means of grace, the Word and sacrament. To follow God's Word is to follow God's lead. Israel traveled a new way they never had gone before. Each day we travel a new path of faith and righteousness in our lives. The only way to safety and the possession of God's blessings is to follow God's Word. That is the beginning of wisdom. That is the fear of the Lord.

What do these stones mean? What does this building and its appointments mean? Why are they here? They are a memorial. Not a memorial simply to remember. But a memorial at which to meditate in thoughtful devotion and consecration.

God grant for Jesus' sake that this memorial be the place where the peoples of the earth will know that the hand of the Lord is powerful all for the sake of Christ.

And, that it serves as the springboard for parents to teach our children and grandchildren about Jesus so we never forget but continue to fear the LORD. Amen. <SDG>