

# **“The Lord Will Do Wonders Among Us!”**

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First Sermon as Pastor of Trinitarian Congregational Church

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**Joshua 1:1-9, Joshua 3:1-6, 14-17**

It’s a day of new beginnings. It’s the launching of my ministry here, but more importantly, it’s the commencement of our ministry together. It’s a “New Day” as the choir sang.

Well, some of the most interesting chapters in the Bible have to do with a new day, a new beginning in the life of the Israelites. It’s found in Joshua Ch. 1, p. 168. Let me set the scene for you. (this is a long intro to the passage) The Israelites are camping on the plains of Moab. Moab is on the “east bank” of the Jordan River, in what is now modern day, Jordan. The Israelites are ready to cross over into the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey. As you’ll recall, after the Exodus from Egypt, their escape from Pharaoh and slavery through the parting of the Red Sea, they then spent 40 long years in the wilderness, in the desert. For 40 years they wandered! Some say it was a journey that should have taken them 40 days, not 40 years! And you know the joke - it’s because Moses wouldn’t stop and ask for directions. It had been a long time in the wilderness. It had been a hard time in the wilderness. Wildernesses are like that, aren’t they? Tough places to be. A time when your faith is tested

But here they are - Moses' people, God's people, standing on the edge of the Promised Land. All that separated them from the Plains of Moab and the Promised Land was the Jordan River. They were standing on the edge of a new day. And they had been prepared and made ready for that new day by Moses. The book of Deuteronomy records the 3 final sermons of Moses that he delivered on the plains of Moab to get the people ready for the Land of Promise. The Israelites have been prepped for this next stage of their journey by Moses and by the divine inspiration that came through him from God.

They were ready for God's promises to come true! They were ready for God's promises to be fulfilled! They were ready to live in God's promises!  
Are you ready?

Are you ready for God's promises to come true?  
Would you do me a favor please? Would you say to at least 3 people - "Are you ready?"

You're ready. I'm ready. North Andover is ready! The Israelites were ready, too. And the Promised Land was ready for them!

But here's what happened - Moses dies. Moses dies in Moab on Mt. Nebo. He goes up onto the mountain, he looks over and sees the Promised Land, and then he dies.

Remember Martin Luther King's final sermon? It was given April 3, 1968, the night before he was assassinated:

*“Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about a thing. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”*

Dr. King was ready for the promises of God to come true. So was Moses. Let's see what happens next. **Joshua 1:1-9:**

*After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, “My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful*

*to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”*

### **Joshua 3:1-6**

*Early in the morning Joshua rose and set out from Shittim with all the Israelites, and they came to the Jordan. They camped there before crossing over. At the end of three days the officers went through the camp and commanded the people, “When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God being carried by the levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place. Follow it, so that you may know the way you should go, for you have not passed this way before. Yet there shall be a space between you and it, a distance of about two thousand cubits; do not come any nearer to it.” Then Joshua said to the people, “Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.” To the priests Joshua said, “Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass on in front of the people.” So they took up the ark of the covenant and went in front of the people.*

### **Joshua 3:14-17**

*When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people. Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho. While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground,*

*the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.*

**I want us to reflect with you this morning just briefly about three things Joshua said to the Israelites. First,**

**I. “You have not passed this way before.”**

*“When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God being carried before you, follow it, for you have not passed this way before.”* It was a new day, a day the Israelites had longed for for 40 years, and even over 450 years if you go back to God’s promise to Abraham and Sarah. It was an exciting time but also an anxious time. *“You have not passed this way before.”*

You probably heard about these two hunters who were walking through the woods one day. They came across a set of bear tracks. In fact, it was the largest set of tracks, the largest paws they had ever seen. And it stopped them dead in their tracks, filled with fear, imagining the size of that bear. Finally one of them spoke - *“I got an idea, Joe, you go that way and see where the bear went, and I’ll go this way and I’ll find out where he came from.”*

The unknown can be a scary thing.

- *will this pastor be there for me when I need him?*
- *will this preacher help me with my faith?*
- *will he accept my doubts?*
- *will I be effective here?*
- *will this congregation accept me for who I am, warts and all?*

The Israelites were anxious. Joshua was anxious. That's why God kept saying to him, "*Be Strong and Courageous, Joshua. Be strong and very courageous.*" Think about the shoes Joshua was filling - Moses! "Yes, Mr. Joshua, welcome to your new position. You may have heard of the last guy to have this job. His name was Moses. They made a movie about his life. It was 'The Ten Commandments.' Charlton Heston played the part of Moses. Who's gonna play you, Mr. Joshua? Adam Sandler?"

For me personally I like the image of Joshua as a pastor, because I don't want to be Moses. "*There's a new Moses in town, Boys.*" The image of Moses as a leader is "The Great One" on high, receiving the commandments of God and coming down and saying, "Thus saith the Lord!" The image of Joshua as a leader is more like, "*There's a Promised Land over there. Do you see it? Can you see it? Let's go there together!*"

God was working here long before I showed up. You've had your Mountaintop Experiences, your Red Sea victories. You know who you are as a people. You don't need Moses to save you. But having a Joshua around just might be helpful to live in the land of God's promises. "*You have not passed this way before.*" Therefore, vs. 5

## **II. Sanctify Yourselves.**

"*You have not passed this way before, sanctify yourselves.*" The word means "*to make holy.*" Other translations say, "*Consecrate yourselves,*" which

means - to devote one's self to the purposes of God. He's saying, *"Rededicate yourselves to God. Renew your devotion to God, deepen your commitment to God, rekindle your love of God."*

David Webster was the chair of the Search Committee that called me. David's in London today. We've been emailing back and forth this week, and he was planning on worshipping this morning at St. Paul's Cathedral, one of the finest places to worship God in all the world.

C.S. Lewis tells the story of a stonemason who was working on one section of a great cathedral for most of his life. You know those cathedrals take many, many years to build, often 100 years or more. They're so large and so ornate. Well, one day someone said to the stonemason, "Don't you ever get discouraged? You're just working on this one wall your whole life."

And he said, *"No, I don't get discouraged, I'm not just building this wall, I'm building a great cathedral to the glory of God."*

We sanctify ourselves today by remembering that the work of church is sacred. It's God's work. It's the continuation of Christ's ministry upon this earth. *"You have not passed this way before, sanctify yourselves."*

### **III. *"For the Lord will do wonders among you."***

The Lord will do wonders among us. The Lord will do wonders in spite of us. The Lord will do wonders because of us and our willingness to be Christ's disciples in our time and place.

Let me close with one of my favorite stories. There was a small town in Germany that was almost completely destroyed in W.W.II. When the war ended the people returned to their village and sought to rebuild it. One of the most precious features of the village was a monument of Christ. It had been created by a famous artist and cherished by the people. They decided to make it one of the first things to be rebuilt. They searched the rubble and found almost every piece. The only thing missing were the hands. They thought about having another set made, but instead they put a plaque below the statue that read: *“You are the hands of Christ.”*

And so we are. He has no other hands than ours to reach out and touch this world. He has no other arms than ours to embrace the sick, the lonely and to lift up the poor. He has no other feet than ours to go where Christ’s love must go. He has no other voice than ours to declare the goodness, love and grace of God.

And these will be the wonders that God will do among us. That we shall be the hands and feet of Christ. Together we’ll be the Body of Christ, and the Lord will do wonders among us!

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Dear Lord,

We are ready. We are ready to be the church together with each other and with you our God. We are ready to love, to serve, to worship, to listen, to risk, to comfort and to reach out with your love that is in us. Empower us, Holy Spirit, as we recommit our lives to you. Rekindle of faith, our hope and our love. In the strong and precious name of Christ our Savior. Amen.