

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dearly Beloved by God,

On Sunday, we heard how Joshua and the Children of Israel crossed over the Jordan on dry ground after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

For 40 years, God had provided for and protected the Israelites in a most inhospitable land, and they had not only survived, but even flourished during that time.

During those years, God had been training Israel in the faith.

He had been training them to trust Him, to believe that what He promised, He would accomplish.

They learned this in the physical, earthly realm, as well as in their spiritual lives.

We see what a wonderful job the Lord did in training His people in faith through the example of Joshua in our text this morning, and we see how it came about in Joshua's question, "**What does my Lord say to his servant?**"

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man was standing before him with His drawn sword in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to him, "Are You for us, or for our adversaries?" And He said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to his servant?" And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in. ^(ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen* ^(John 17:17)

Did you notice a stark contrast between Joshua and the city of Jericho?

Joshua fearlessly goes up to a man with a drawn sword,

while the king, mighty men, and the people of Jericho are locked in because of fear.

Both were standing before God. The same sword could have devoured them both in judgment.

So what was the difference between Joshua and Jericho?

You could say that their "faith" was the difference, but you would need to qualify that answer, because both of them had faith, both of them trusted that the LORD was real.

We know this because Rahab reported to the spies that the hearts of the people of Jericho melted within them as they heard of Israel's complete victory over Egypt, and over the total annihilation of kingdoms on the eastern side of the Jordan.

So the Canaanites had faith. They believed that the Lord was real and powerful.

They had what we call the "natural knowledge of God."

This is what we can know and learn about God by nature – that He is all-powerful and just.

So their reaction is completely normal. They fear Him. They fear His punishment.

And seeing the people of Israel, having crossed the Jordan so miraculously

and encamped in the valley of the plain of Jericho, their fear of Him only increased.

Joshua, on the other hand, also had faith in the Lord. But His faith produced fearlessness. He exhibits the gifts and fruits of what we call a revealed knowledge of God.

Like the people of Jericho, he knew of God's power and justice.

He had seen it many times, upon the Egyptians, upon the Amalekites and Amorites, even upon the rebellious and unbelieving people of Israel in the wilderness.

But he had also known 40 years of God's covenants, promises and fulfillments, 40 years of protection and preservation, 40 years of sacrifices, 40 years of unmerited and unequalled forgiveness.

For Joshua, to go up to this armed Man, was not a gamble.

If He was a friend, great. If he was an enemy, he relied on God's grace, no matter the outcome.

So what do we make of the disciples in our Gospel lesson today?

On that first Easter evening, they were sitting behind locked doors, just like Jericho.

We're told that this was "for fear of the Jews" who had killed Jesus only 3 days before.

Should we chastise them for their lack of faith, for locking themselves in?

This situation requires a closer examination before casting an all-encompassing judgment.

As we make this examination of their situation, we can also examine our own.

Because, I'm sure you've noticed, we also are in lockdown, and for many, because of fear.

Was it wrong for the disciples to be behind locked doors? No!

No more than it is for you to lock your doors at home, day or night.

It is a reasonable precaution in this fallen world, isn't it?

There are people who commit evil, whether by opportunity or with malicious intent.

The chief priests and Jewish leaders had just proven what lengths they were willing to go.

But that they did it in fear, this shows us that their faith in God's protection was shaken.

And from our natural human standpoint, understandably so. Put yourself in their sandals.

The man you thought was the Messiah, just rolled over and let Himself die.

He didn't defend Himself. He didn't allow you to defend Him. He just took it.

And now that He is believed to be dead, what does that mean about what He taught?

About what you had learned for the last three years of your life spent following this guy?

Was He a false prophet? An anti-christ? A blasphemer, justly condemned by the chief priests?

Were His miracles the works of the devil? His exorcisms truly by the power of beelzebul?

And if this were God's judgment upon this "false christ," what was His judgment upon you?

I wouldn't doubt that more than just physical death would be on your minds behind locked doors.

You'd want more time of grace to sort this all out before meeting your Maker.

And in reality, are the locked doors really going to save you from the Jewish leaders?

No more than the walls of Jericho were going to save them from the Lord.

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The same is true about our current government mandated lockdown.

It is reasonable for us to take certain precautions at the current time, just like locking your doors, and even taking proactive measures like paying attention to our health.

We desire to *do no bodily harm to our neighbor*, (Explanation: 5th Comm.)

Nor do we desire *to harm or shorten our life by foolhardiness or worry.* (Cat. Q & A. #55)

We may have different views about what is reasonable and what isn't,
but it isn't just about what we do, it's also why we do it.

Are we sanitizing our hands and shopping carts and wearing masks
because we are deathly afraid of death, or illness?

Are we shut up behind locked doors, anxious and worried, full of fear?

Are we so concerned, or not concerned, about ourselves that we haven't concerned ourselves
with or cared for the physical, mental, or spiritual well-being of others?

Such fear, whether it is debilitating, sleep depriving, or just stealing your comfort in Christ,
shows that you have a misplaced trust. That you have an idol, a god other than the Lord of life.
And that fear comes from the realization: you can't control, manipulate, or save your own life.
Death doesn't understand sanitation. Germs don't stop at 6 feet. Age isn't the determining factor.
Strong immune systems don't stop accidents.

Joshua showed where his faith was when He recognized the Lord before him with a drawn sword.
He bowed down and worshipped him.

Put himself in a completely submissive and vulnerable position.

He asked, **What does my Lord say to His servant?**

He could do this because this was the God of his deliverance and salvation.

Whether he lived (in good health or in poor), it was the Lord who would bring it about,
or died, in battle or in age, by crime, by illness, or by accident.

And Joshua was comfortable with that.

He believed that His gracious God redeemed him, not with gold or silver,
not even with the blood of Passover lambs or sacrificial bulls,
but with the holy, precious blood of the One who stood before him.

Joshua could stand before the Commander of the Lord's army because he had a clean conscience,
clean, not because of his own lack of worry or fear, or any innate bravery or courage,
but cleansed of his fears and idols and his misplaced trusts
by the perfect, fearless life of Jesus who gave up His life, who didn't defend Himself,
but committed Himself, in life and death, only to His heavenly Father's good & gracious will.

...

The disciples were also trained, as Joshua was.

They heard the Word of the Lord from the women, on the road to Emmaus,
and from our resurrected Lord's own lips.

They saw Him, touched Him, heard Him.

Dare I say that they even tasted His crucified and risen body and blood as they broke bread
and received Him alive and well in His own Supper.

They go from cowering in fear to boldly proclaiming Him without fear of human punishment
or death in only a matter of 7 weeks.

Why? Because the Lord and giver of faith is also the object of our faith.

You confess each week that you believe in God the Father almighty, and in Jesus Christ,
and in the Holy Spirit.

This is the same God that Joshua and the Apostles believed in, and for the same reason:
that He lived, suffered, died, and rose again to redeem you from all your sins,

from your worry, your anxiety, your fears, your idols.
He is almighty and just AND merciful, just as He has revealed Himself to you by His Word.
You have nothing to fear, not even death itself, whether by virus, or accident, or age, etc.
for Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed.**
He is risen for your justification. You are justified, you are declared not guilty.
You stand before God with a clean conscience, and need not fear,
even though He were to stand before you with a drawn sword.
For He has fought and still fights for you. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

Historical Note:

After Israel crossed the Jordan, they immediately circumcised all who had been born in the wilderness.
(This was normally to have been done on the 8th day after birth, but for some reason it had not been.)
This was in preparation for this new generation to celebrate the Passover, only 3 / 4 days away.
Remember, for 38 years, the Passover had not been celebrated while in the wilderness.
A whole generation had not seen what God had done in Egypt.
The oldest among the warriors had been only youths, 20 years and younger, when this happened.
So they celebrated the Passover anew in the Promised Land and they ate the first-fruit of the land.
Immediately after the Passover, after they had eaten of the land, God stopped providing manna.
Now the Lord would provide for them through the normal means of seasonal foods.