

Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – August 24, 2023

The Lord be with you.

To boldly go where no man has gone before. Do you remember that the challenge, the mission that begin each episode of Star Trek? Well, I wanna know how those words sound to you today... To go where you've never gone before. Do they sound exciting? Do they sound well, scary? In this time of pandemic, lock down school closures, unemployment, social unrest, we're all going where we've never gone before, and that means uncertainty, anxiety, confusion.

Well, God has a good word for us today as we go barreling down a highway where we've never been, God's word today comes from an Old Testament story where the Israelites are also going where they've never gone before. The Israelites are on the exodus, God leading them out of the bondage of Egypt, through the wilderness to the Promised Land, and the Bible says that the Israelites on the Exodus journey that they are a type of symbol, a picture of God's people today as God is also leading you and me on our own Exodus journeys out of the bondage through a wilderness into the fullness of God's promise.

We're looking at a story in the book of Joshua, Chapter 3, the first four verses I read, the Israelites came to the Jordan, they camp 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 priest, then you shall set out from your place, follow it, follow the Ark of the Covenant, so that you may know the way you should go. For you have not passed this way before.

I turned to this story today because... Well, because I see you and me in it, that we're going where we've never been before as a nation, and yes, as individuals, we've never been this way before, we are in uncharted territory. We do not have GPS for what lies ahead. Now, the Israelites have come to the bank of the Jordan river, it's at its flood stage... Let me add, it's dangerous to cross over, and once more when they cross over into the promised land, there will be dangers there and but more there will be no more manner for them every day, there were be no more glory cloud over head showing the way.

So everything is going to be different for them. They truly have not passed this way before, I've underline in my Bible, verses three and four, as they really speak to me today, when you see the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God being carried by the levitical priest, then you shall set out from your place, follow it, follow the Ark of the Covenant. Follow it so that you may know the way you should go for, you have not passed this way before. In the Old Testament, the Ark of the Covenant was a wooden box overlaid with gold. It was kept in the holy of holies, in the tabernacle, and the Ark of the Covenant. It represents the presence of God with His people. The Ark of the Covenant is the visible reminder, the visible pledge that God goes with his people. Notice in today's text that God tells his people as they're getting ready to cross over, he says, Keep your eyes on the Ark of the Covenant, follow it, so that you may know the way to go. For you have not passed this way before. The Bible tells us that what the Ark of the Covenant represents in the Old Testament. Jesus is that for you and me today. Jesus is God. Jesus is God with us. I am with you always. Jesus says, even to the end of the age. And so the Bible tells us,

Keep your eyes on Jesus. Follow Jesus, you have not passed this way before. Now, I wanna be frank, I would be frightened where there's pandemic might be taking us, where the economy might be taken us, where politics might be taking us, I really would be frightened. Except I wake up every day knowing that Jesus goes with us. Hebrews 13:5, for Jesus has said, I will never leave you or forsake you. So we can say with confidence, The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?

We have a plaque in our house, it says, Don't worry about the future. God is already there. Neither you nor I am been this the way before, but we keep rises on Jesus. Now, there's something else in today's text, it's got my attention, it's the words crossing over the Israelites stand on the bank of the Jordan River at its flood stage, and in the Hebrew text, the words crossing over are emphasized throughout the Book of Joshua. In fact, in the Hebrew text, the word for crossing over is used 22 times in just this one chapter and the next, as there was a point that God wants to make. In the very word Hebrew itself, the word Hebrew comes from a verb, meaning one who crosses over. The word Hebrew is first Jews in the Bible of Abraham, in Genesis 14:13, of Abraham who had the command of God, leaves his father's house in Holland, and he crosses over the Euphrates going into the land of promise, not knowing where he is going, except God goes with him as he crosses over, God intends that His people to be known as people who had the command of God dare to cross over, to cross over where they have never been before.

So here's my take away.

Yes, we do not know what the days ahead, what the weeks ahead will bring us, but what we do know is that Jesus goes with us. We keep our eyes on Jesus, we follow him. No fancy formulas here, but keeping our eyes on Jesus. And I, I wonder how Jesus might be calling you today to cross over to... Cross over into new ways of doing ministry, to cross over into new ways of doing an old job, new ways of reaching out with the good news to those around you, so keep your eyes on Jesus. We've never been this way before, but follow Him, it's going to be exciting.

And I closed with that blessing that God gives us people on the Exodus journey. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon you and give you peace.

I m Tim Smith, a fellow traveler on the pilgrim way. Thanks for listening. Until next time.