



Diane Christopher

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**Too Much Water
Joshua 3:14-17; Psalm 69:1-3**

We hear the stories of too much water: Tsunamis, hurricanes, and these past few weeks, too much water on the east coast as two storms came together. When there is too much water, there is destruction, loss of possessions, homes, lives, a missing ship. The picture on the front of your bulletin of the car submerged in water is not from the east coast. It is from Tucson during one of our flooding rains.

Too much water is dangerous water. Our scripture passages this morning are about too much water. Turn with me to our scripture passages today found in your bulletin. The Joshua passage is about too much water, literally. The Psalm compares hard times and trials to too much water.

But before we read God's word, let us pray.

Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen.

Read Psalm 69:1-3

Have you ever felt like that? Had a trial that was so difficult that you felt like you were drowning? Too much water.

Let's look at the Joshua passage. Here is the context: God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and promised them their own land. However, the people sinned greatly against God, and as a result, God told them they will not see the

promised land. However, their children will. They will wander in the wilderness until their generation has passed away and a new one has risen up.

Fast-forward 40 years. There is a new generation, one that did not experience the rescue from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea. They heard about it. There is a new leader. Moses is dead. Joshua is the new leader. And the people are standing on the edge of the Jordan River, ready to claim the land that God has promised.

There is one little problem: they must cross the river, and it is flooded. It has overflowed its banks. There is too much water. The river is 150 miles long. There is no low water crossing in sight. There are no bridges. The water is impassable. Can you imagine the people standing at the banks of the river. They see their promised land on the other side and they can't get there.

You need to remember, they had been slaves for 400 years. They have been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. For 440 years, they did not have any land to call their own. They had hoped, walked, suffered, prayed, talked, cried, trusted, regretted, sinned and whined their way to this moment. They want to cross, but don't know how.

My previous church to this one was in New Jersey. When I first moved there, my parents and brother came out to visit me. We did all the tourist things, including a visit to NYC. We parked on the NJ side and took a ferry to the Statue of Liberty, then over to Manhattan to see Ground Zero.

The day went by, and soon it was 6 p.m. We were tired and ready to call it a day. We walked over to where the ferry left us off to find that the ferries were done running for the day. We had just missed the last one. We asked the guy what to do and he, "Take a train?" and walked away.

We didn't know what to do. We were on the water's edge. We looked to the left and saw a bridge way far away. We looked to the right and saw a bridge even further away. My brother and I looked at my tired parents and knew we couldn't walk far.

We stopped a policeman. He basically said we were on our own and drove away. We were definitely in NYC. I had visions of us spending a very expensive night in the Big Apple. The problem was this was Saturday, and I preached the next morning. I had to get home. I was the solo pastor.

Finally, my brother saw a taxi driver and waved him down. My brother explained where our car was and asked the driver if he was willing to drive to NJ thinking we would have to drive to one of those distant bridges.

Sure! he said. He quoted a price, we said fine, and we piled into the taxi. While in that taxi, we discovered there was another way to get across the water. We only knew of two ways, on it or over it. But there was a way hidden from us, one the taxi driver knew.

We didn't realize you could go under the water. A tunnel close by. I had no idea!

There was a way across the Jordan River, one the Israelites did not know about, but God knew. At the beginning of our chapter (Joshua 3), God comes to their new leader, Joshua, and tells him what to do: have the priests take the Ark of the Covenant and carry it into the water.

Two things you need to know: the current is strong, and could easily carry the priests and Ark down the river. And, you need to know something about the Ark of the Covenant. It was a box, but it was sacred to the Israelites. It contained the most holiest of items: Aaron's staff...the one used to cause the plagues in Egypt, which allowed them to be released from slavery. It was a staff used by God to do mighty things.

The Ark contained the tablets of the 10 commandments, written by the finger of God. And, the Ark contained a jar of manna, the food God provided every day for 40 years as the Israelites wandered in the wilderness. Priceless items. Holy items. The Ark represented the presence of God.

It's a risky step towards the promise that waits on the other side of the river. Imagine the feelings of those priests with the Ark of the Covenant on their shoulders, walking up to the riverbank, knowing that their first step into the river could be their last if the current caught them. And the Ark, the presence of God, would disappear with them.

This is where we pick up our scripture passage: Read Joshua 3:14-17.

I grew up in the Land of 10,000 Lakes: Minnesota. I grew up in the City of Lakes, Minneapolis. I lived near 4 of those lakes. And almost every friend had a cabin on a lake in Minnesota. I was always in water in summer. I had a ritual before I went into the water. I had to know how cold the water was before I entered. I put my toes in the water to test it.

God tells the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant to use the toe method. Just put your toes in. Step into the raging water, and see what I will do, God says. Trust me, be faithful, and watch what happens. And they do.

Faith means taking a step and getting your feet wet.

Many people come to a major barrier in their lives and decide that it's just better to stay on the desert side of the river. But God calls us to take a step, to get our feet wet, to let go of the desert side of the river. So, how do we let go? When do we let go? How do we take the risk?

I was talking with Larry the other day about the missing ship from the storm last week – the ship that entered into the storm with 33 people. The seasoned captain was planning on going around the storm, but apparently they lost power and could not do so. They went directly into the storm.

The ship has not been found, but some of the lifeboats have. Larry said, why were they empty of people? The way they make lifeboats could have withstood the waves and wind. The people could have survived if they had gotten into the lifeboats. But they stayed with the ship. When do you let go and get into the lifeboat and trust God?

Are you prepared to let go and cross over the Jordan you are now facing?

It starts by allowing God to move ahead of you. Joshua instructed the priests to carry the Ark of the Covenant (remember, it represents the presence of God) into the water. The people were to follow it, to fall into formation behind God, not to march ahead of God.

We are to move forward one small step at a time. Dip our feet into the water, one step at a time. Then, watch what God will do. "Take the first step in faith," said the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "You don't have to see the whole staircase; just take the first step."

We need to practice being people who trust that God will make a way for us when there seems to be no way. Trust isn't merely a passive wishing that God would do something for us. It means that we're willing to take that one step. To trust that God has a hidden way, one we will not see *until* we take that first step.

When the Israelite's took those first steps, God's promise became a reality. The waters stood up on the north side of the crossing, and the people crossed over on dry ground. For the first time, they are called a nation.

It's a new thing. It's a new beginning. It's a new chapter in the history of God's people. The Jordan has washed away their identity as homeless wanderers. They are now the nation of Israel.

We each have a Jordan River that must be crossed. It seems that the life of faith is a series of water crossings. We are filled with questions as we come to our Jordans: How deep is it? How solid is the bottom? Is it slippery? Is the water cold? How strong is the current? How far across is the river? What will I find on the other side?

All good questions, questions that arise every time we make a move, whether geographical, emotional, or spiritual. However, they are not questions that get answered *before* we step into the river of new life. It is God, not the answers, that takes us across our Jordan.

One step is all it takes. That first step gives God something to work with. As soon as Israel's feet were "dipped in the edge of the water" God acted, the flowing waters stood still. There was dry land, and all the people crossed over to something new.

We all have that one step that needs to be taken. Take that first step and you have offered God something with which to work. The floodwaters of your life will be parted, dry land will be revealed, the way forward will be opened, and you will start something new.

What is that next step for you? Maybe the first step is to offer another person forgiveness and reconciliation. Maybe your one step is to let go of anger or resentment. Maybe your life is unmanageable and that first step is just one of twelve. Sometimes the one step is to simply be quiet, be still, and listen (this is what Joshua told the people before they stepped into the water – Listen to the words of God, he said).

Perhaps your step is to let go of having to be right or in control. Maybe it means you no longer let fear dominate your life. Perhaps the next step for you is to risk intimacy and vulnerability. Maybe your next step is deciding to go into assisted living, or move back to where the kids are. Maybe that one step is deciding to start that treatment for the illness you face. Or, maybe not taking the treatment at all.

Step out in faith into the river you must cross. There may be too much water, but God takes your step and leads you safely across the river.

I end with a poem, which is a shocking because I don't like poetry...mainly, because I don't understand it. My brain thinks in numbers. But oddly enough, I understand this poem. Listen closely because you may not hear a poem from me again. This is for all you poem lovers. It's called "Into the River."

INTO THE RIVER (by Andrew King)

[\(Joshua 3: 7-17\)](#)

Take the covenant with you into the river –
the boundary river, the risky river between
future and past, between fear and hope,
whose swirling depths can dislodge your feet –

take the covenant with you into the river –
the river that is all that is out of control,
restless and relentless and gnawing its banks,
whose wild floods can drown field and home –

take the covenant with you into the river –
chilling and destructive, peaceful and refreshing,
the river that is world, full of mystery and song,
whose waters can bless like renewal of life –

take the covenant with you into all of your rivers –
let it rest on your shoulders when you take
your steps, let it remind you of a promise,
let it remind of God's presence,

that you do not cross the boundaries alone,
that you are not abandoned in the raging floods,
that in the depths that would knock you
off your careful feet, God's love is anchor

to hold and to guide, and waters of danger
shall not overwhelm, and waters of chaos
may bring newness of life, and out of the noise
of rushing waters may rise a beautiful song.

Take the covenant with you.
Watch even the river become
servant of love.