

Manchester United Methodist Church
October 30, 2005 - Dr. Carl L. Schenck
"Getting Our Feet Wet"
All Saint Sunday
Joshua 3:7-17; Matthew 23:1-12

It's tough to follow a legend. Think of examples. Think of John Adams, the second president of the United States, who had to follow George Washington, the father of the country. How do you follow that act? Or, President Johnson [the first one] who followed Abraham Lincoln. How do you follow Lincoln? Or even our own Missouri president, Harry Truman, who followed Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who was president longer than anyone else has ever been president, and took the country through depression and war. It's tough to follow a legend. It's true in government and politics. It's also true in other areas of life. For example, does anyone know who the coach was that followed Vince Lombardi? Or, who followed Knute Rockney at Notre Dame? Or who was the coach that followed the legendary Red Auerbach of the Boston Celtics? It's tough.

It is very, very difficult to follow a legend. That's the setting of our Old Testament lesson today. For if you think those legends that I mentioned would be tough to follow, how would you like to be the successor to Moses, for heaven's sake? Moses – if there ever was a larger-than-life figure, it's Moses. It was Moses who was God's human instrument of bringing the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. It was Moses who had led them for forty years in the wilderness. Most of them, living at the time of our lesson, had known only Moses as their leader, all their life. It was Moses who had talked to God, face to face, and brought the tablets of the Ten Commandments down from Mount Sinai. Moses was all of that and more. He was a heroic larger than life figure.

Just as the people of Israel were brought to the very doorstep of the promised land, Moses died and his assistant took over. You know, it would be pretty easy to be only remembered as Moses' assistant, not what you became yourself. For you see, when you follow a legend, it is extremely difficult to have your own identity, to have your own authority, to have the strength to lead, in the shadow of a legend. All of those things are tough, and our hero of the story today is Joshua, the one who had been Moses' assistant, the one who was now the leader of the people. The one who was given the task of leading the people into the promised land.

Now if you were listening to the story carefully, you know that as they were on this doorstep of the promised land, there was a body of water between them and the land of promise. It was the Jordan River. They had to cross this body of water to get into their land of promise. They remembered the stories of how Moses, when they fled Egypt, had parted the Red Sea and then, here they were again, facing a body of water. You know, in the Bible, the River Jordan is the stuff of lore. It comes up again and again in the Bible. In the Bible, the River Jordan has the place, the importance, the majesty of the mighty Mississippi. Except that it's about half the size of the Meramec! But remember, it's an arid, semi-desert area where any stream that ran twelve months of the year with water was a big deal.

So this water was between the people of Israel and their land of promise. Joshua, the new leader, said to them, "Get ready, we're marching through the river the next day." Then he had the priests put the Ark of the Covenant on their shoulder. Did you hear what happened? The river didn't part until the first priest put his foot in the water. Now that, to me, is an image of faith. It's easy to march through on the dry ground when the waters have parted, but those first priests carrying the ark of the covenant, they had to step into the water before it would part. They didn't get to see the miracle; they didn't get into their promised land; they didn't have all these wonders take place around them unless they put their foot in

the Jordan. If they hadn't gotten their feet wet, all of the rest would have been lost.

I think that's a lesson for us as we approach this time of renewing our commitment. It's easy to talk about renewing our commitment and our passion for prayers, presence, gifts and service. But expressing that commitment in real ways is another thing all together.

Take prayer – prayer isn't easy for a lot of people. A lot of folks have to work at it. A lot of folks get more sleep than prayer done when they try. But you know, the blessings of a life of prayer don't come first. The discipline of a life of prayer comes first. You have to put your foot in before the waters part. A month or six weeks ago, all of who you are members of the congregation received a letter. It was an invitation to pray for a particular household in our church for the next year. It gave you the name of your prayer household. If you don't have anything else to pray about, you can pray for that household.

I would hope that you would see, particularly in these two weeks as we run up to our commitment day, that you would be praying about the other dimensions of your commitment – prayers, but also presence, gifts and service. To pray about a self-selected challenge goal of attendance and worship. How many times a year? I'm not going to tell you what your goals should be. But we're asking you to set a goal and to pray about what that goal ought to be, and to know that you have to put your foot in the water.

To pray about how you're going to serve. Tim talked about those two hundred ministries and that Every Member in Ministry catalog. They represent occasions where people are going to be helped into their land of promise. You volunteer to work for Habitat for Humanity or Room at the Inn, or go on a mission trip, or teach a Sunday School class, or work with the youth. In all of those, you are seeking to part the waters for someone else. The waters don't part until we sign up and put our foot in. Where, where are you going to place your energies and your time to make the land of promise possible for someone else?

Prayers, presence, service and then, of course, there's that gifts thing. The majority of people here have not yet made the switch from thinking about a financial commitment, in terms of how many dollars, to thinking about it as a proportion of income. Maybe over these next two weeks you could pray about that switch. Not how many dollars will I give, but what share of my income will I give? There are blessings that come when we pray. When we participate, when we serve, and when we give. But those promised blessings come when we take that step and we get our feet wet.

I'd invite you to look again at that list of saints that we honored a few moments ago. I suspect that many of you can find at least one person on that list that, in some way, was a help, or an example, or a challenge in your life. They were people who got their feet wet. Will we?