

**Davidson College Presbyterian Church**  
**Davidson, North Carolina**  
**Robert Alexander**  
**“Moving On”**  
**Joshua 3:7-17**  
**November 5, 2017**

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On November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1983 – 34 years ago today – a small engine plane went down near Banner Elk, NC killing all five people aboard. The passengers were on their way to an Auburn-Maryland football game in Alabama. One of the passengers was Mark McCauley – my 15 year old classmate and friend. I remember hearing the news of the crash. It was a Saturday morning and I was on my way to a scouting event for the day at Camp Raven Knob. I felt numb. We talked about it during the ride to the camp but we were all mostly in shock. In the days and weeks that followed, my classmates and I had a really difficult time dealing with Mark’s death. There was anger and denial and grief, but I suppose it was nothing compared to the challenge that Mark’s sister Allison faced. She was the only person from her family who had not been on the plane that day. I don’t know how she managed, but somehow, through prayer and love and support and community, Allison, and all of us really, were able to move on past that terrible day.

We have no way of knowing what the feeling was like among the Israelites following the death of Moses. The beginning of the book of Joshua marks his death and a dramatic new chapter in Israel’s history. Moses’ death wasn’t tragic but I imagine there was that same anger and denial and grief among the community that many of us experience when a loved one dies. Add to that the fear and uncertainty of what the future might hold. He had, after all, for more than forty years been their spiritual leader - their primary connection to God. And now he was no longer with them. But the text makes it clear that God would raise up Joshua in the eyes of the people to demonstrate that God was with Joshua just as God was with Moses. Would the people respond with faith and trust or would they respond with fear and anger?

Author and pastor Walt Wangerin wrote a book years ago entitled Mourning into Dancing. The title is taken from Psalm 30:5 – one of my favorite verses – which reads, “Weeping may linger for the night but joy comes with the morning.” In the book he writes that when we experience grief and loss what we most need to do is to place our trust again in God. The problem is that rather than do that it is instead common for us to resist falling completely and helplessly into God’s arms. Helplessness scares us. We want to keep a little control. The lack of it leaves us blind; and blind trust feels like another kind of death to us.<sup>1</sup> In other words – we have a hard time letting go.

But that seems to be exactly what the Israelites do. They fall into God’s arms again – trusting in God’s presence and provision. They move on into the future that God has for them. After wandering in the wilderness for forty years they were on the verge of claiming the promise that YHWH had given to Abraham way back in Genesis 12 – to give his descendants the Land of Canaan and to make them a blessing to the nations of the earth. All that was standing in their way was the Jordan River. Their crossing of the Jordan would be reminiscent of the Israelites crossing of the Red Sea – although this time they were not fleeing an enemy but rather running into the face of battle and conflict as they claimed the land that had been promised to them. What they were fleeing was fear and grief and anxiety of the unknown. What they were claiming was God’s promise, God’s future, and God’s very self.

It was the spring of the year. The rains had come and the river was swollen. The snows from Mt. Hermon had melted and those waters were running into the Jordan as well. This was no creek they were to cross. The priests lifted the Ark of the Covenant and approached the river. As soon as they touched the water it began to pile up in one heap far upstream so that the riverbed became dry. The priests went out into the riverbed and

stopped right in the middle of the Jordan until all the people had safely crossed and then they too went up out of the river.

The Ark of the Covenant, representing God's presence among the people, was the reminder to them that God was with them and that God would remain faithful to them as they went to their new home. Hundreds of years after the promise was given to Abraham - Israel's patriarch - his descendants finally crossed the Jordan and entered the Promised Land - with God firmly established in their midst.

Later in chapter four we learn that the twelve men mentioned in chapter three - representatives from each tribe - had a specific job to do. They were to get a stone from the middle of the river - from where the priests had stood - and take it into the camp where they would stay the first night after the river crossing. They were to pile those stones up in that camp as a reminder of God's faithfulness to them. This was a teaching tool. When the children asked - "Why are all those stones piled up over there?" the story would be shared with them about the crossing of the Jordan River and of how God was faithful to them.

This event, the Crossing of the Jordan, has for years been a symbol of God's promise to carry **us all** safely through this life and into the next. The Promised Land has represented our heavenly dwelling place where we will fully enjoy God's peace. The Jordan crossing has represented God's faithfulness to carry us there. God's people are assured of God's faithfulness **in the journey** and reminded of the importance of **their faithfulness** to the God of all creation!

All of us are on a journey. We are on our personal journeys of understanding, growth, and exploration. We are on journeys as family systems, as a community, and as a nation. We are even on a journey as part of the human family and as part of creation. But the most important journey is the one we take as God's people. That journey defines us in relationship to the one who created us and set us on the road. That journey focuses us on the priorities and purposes of our Lord Jesus Christ who came to offer his life for the sake of the world, for you and for me, that we might have new life and walk in faithfulness with God. That journey reminds us that our lives are not our own as we witness the presence of God in our midst each and every day. The Christian cannot separate this journey from all the rest though we may attempt to do so from day to day. No effort to compartmentalize our lives will change the fact that when we proclaim that Christ is our Lord and Savior, we are saying that we acknowledge Him as **Lord of all things** and not just some parts of our lives.

We proclaim Christ as Lord of our minds, our attitudes, our words, our actions, our families, our work patterns, our free time, our choices, our money, our toys, our homes, our vote, our church, our community, and our world. Christ is Lord of all journeys and all parts of those journeys. Our God has the power to carry us from point A to point B and to faithfully deliver us to our final destination. That is the God we worship and serve!

From our baptism in the waters of the Red Sea to the Crossing of the Jordan into our final resting place, we belong to God and we are to seek to honor Him every moment of every day with every fiber of our being!

But we do get stopped when we experience loss. And we grieve - and we forget - and we lose sight of God's presence. We fear what lies ahead and so we get stuck in the past - in the way things used to be - rather than open ourselves to what God has for us in the next steps of our journey. And it is hard to embrace what's next when you can't let go of what was.

So we look again at that pile of twelve rocks from the Jordan River and we remember God's faithfulness. Or we look at that table and imagine those twelve disciples sitting around it and the Lord Jesus washing their feet and we remember the deep love and sacrifice that he made so that we might have abundant and eternal life. Or we look at the sister of a friend who died 34 years ago and find inspiration to go on because she was able to with the love and support of her community. We move on, trusting in new leadership, trusting in God's provision, and trusting that God keeps God's promises! We move on, remembering that others have gone on before us and that they are now a part of that great cloud of witnesses that encourages us in our journey today.

And so, on this All-Saints Sunday, we remember those who have traveled faithfully through this life in preparation for their new home. They knew that God was with them on their journey and they trusted God to guide them into the next life. Now they are experiencing their rest in God's gracious embrace.

This morning we honor the lives of those from our own congregation who have Crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land. After each name is read, Jane/David will ring a hand bell and then there will be a moment of silence. After the last name is read, there will be a final chime for you to remember others dear to you who we have not mentioned by name. I'll be remembering my friend Mark.

May our brothers and sisters in the faith, who have gone before us, inspire us to trust God more and more every day of our journey as we move on into God's future for us here at Davidson College Presbyterian Church.

**To God be the Glory! Amen.**

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<sup>i</sup> Walt Wangerin in Mourning into Dancing (Harper Collins: Grand Rapids) 1992, p. 266.