

**July 14, 2019**  
**Fifth Sunday after Pentecost**

**First Presbyterian Church**  
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## **UP FROM THE CRACKS II**

Joshua 1:1-9

Today's reading describes two transitions: the transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua - and God's people crossing River Jordan to the Promised Land.

Joshua 1

1After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, 2" My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. 3Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. 4From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. 5No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. 6Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. 7Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. 8This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. 9I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Prayer for illumination

God of Courage, be in our speaking. Be also in our listening, and speak to our souls' deep understanding. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

## UP FROM THE CRACKS II

Joshua 1:1-9

There's a scene in the movie, "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade," when the intrepid archaeologist/adventurer is fleeing one enemy or another, and comes to the edge of a huge and yawning chasm. He stops his forward progress just in the nick of time, and teeters there, about to fall in. Then he rights himself, and surveys his situation.

He can't go back; danger lurks there. Yet it seems just as impossible to go forward: that would mean certain death. Then, Indiana Jones reaches down and picks up a handful of gravel. He throws it out ahead of him, over the cliff. The falling stones don't travel far: just a few inches below the level of his boots, they land on an invisible footbridge he never knew was there.

That's not a bad image for the transitional times of life: the passages from one stage to another. Whenever you or I must say goodbye to the old and embrace the new – however fearsome and unfamiliar the new may seem – there may appear for a time to be no way forward. But there is such a way: it just hasn't been revealed yet.

Living through transitions requires trust: trust in God, who helps us to rise, even when we fear we will soon be falling through the cracks. Two Sundays ago, in this series we noted even the lore of children recognizes that transitions are hazardous places. - "Don't step on the cracks, or you'll break your mother's back." The cracks in a sidewalk mark the transition from one slab of pavement to another.

"Cracks" – are times of transition - the hinge between that which has been, and that which is yet to be.

Transitions are constant fixtures along the landscape of our lives. Childhood to adolescence, adolescence to adulthood, adulthood to – "my how good you look!" High school to college, college to the workplace, workplace to retirement. Single life to married life – married life to single life. No nest - to full nest - to empty nest . Transitions are the "in-between times," that separate pain and promise. Said Adam to Eve as they walked out of the Garden of Eden: "I believe we are now in a time of transition.

A man named Bill Bridges has written a very insightful book called "The Way Of Transition; Embracing Life's Most Difficult Moments," In it he describes helpful ways individuals and groups can navigate through change... Bridges suggests that change begins first with endings... a concluding of things... . How well we end things- or how poorly we conclude matters- often determines how successfully we cope with the change that takes place. Then comes an in-between time of some confusion and uncertainty... a very fertile time, but often a challenging time of some discomfort. Only then can we embrace a new beginning.... and that's something that often comes upon us by surprise.

To rise up from the cracks involves exchanging the familiar for the unfamiliar; being open to new possibilities; looking forward to the future, with hope. As someone once said: "Change is inevitable, growth is optional." Or as Heraklitos, the Greek Philosopher put it this way "Change alone is unchanging... The beginning of a circle is also its end." And, I might add, the end is also the beginning. Like a seed that must die to be planted, followed by a dark

time of germination, which generates a green shoot that sprouts up from the cracks; transition can be the fertile framework for transformation.

For some, transformation is unconscious and intrinsic, like the unfolding of a bud into flower. For others, transformation is painfully intentional; born of courageous decision-making and forged by the strength of perseverance. Whether calculated or serendipitous, transitions provide rich possibilities for transformation. This is what we see reflected in the first chapter of Joshua as it provides a framework to inspire us to rise up from the cracks.

In verse six we read: "be strong and courageous..." As you encounter transitions, as anxiety-producing new horizons swim up toward you... be bold to go where God calls you to go. If you're not willing to risk wading into a Jordan River toward something uncertain... you'll never discover the Promised Land God has prepared for you.

In verse seven we read, "turn not to the right or the left..." The implications here are clear. Stay the course according to God's design. We will never discover God's best for us unless we're willing to remain singularly focused on obeying God's word for our lives...

In verse 8, we read "Do not let the Book of the Law depart from your mouth, but meditate upon it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is in it, for then you shall be prosperous and successful." The focal point is God's word and obedience to it... not personalities, or the circumstances of change that you face. Because, in the midst of change- there's something that doesn't change; God's steadfast love that endures forever. It is in faithfulness to what God reveals that we will find our way up from the cracks and place our feet firmly in the promised land.

In verse 9, we read, "be not afraid". "Yahweh- the LORD your God will go with you wherever you go." VOCATUS atque non VOCATUS deus aderit "Bidden or not bidden, God is present," the old Latin phrase reminds us.

It is especially for people of faith that transition -- those times when life takes us through significant change -- is given greater meaning and purpose because God is forming the image of Christ in our lives. The name "Joshua" in Aramaic, is Jesus - and both names mean "Savior." Just as Joshua led the Israelites to the promised land, Jesus Christ is leading us. Transition for the Christian need not be just a disorienting, uncomfortable experience in which we lose our footing and focus; rather it is a time when God calls us to go forward in faith and rise up from the cracks.

Marilyn Ferguson has written that, "It's not so much that we're afraid of change or so in love with the old ways, but it's that place in between that we fear... It's like being in between trapezes. We can never grasp the next bar until we let go of the one we are holding. Transitions always involve risk, and real life rarely sports a safety net. Danger always lurks in the shadows of the unknown.

"Transformation," writes William Bridges, "is the true destination of transition ... break(ing) through the barriers and realizing our greater potentialities, not by a willed excursion into new ... territory, but by the willingness to view our own individual crises as critical opportunities to let go of who we have been, and to set forth on the journey toward becoming something more."

May you and I discover, in our own times of transition, especially when we face obstacles that separate us from the promised land of peace and plenty, like a Jordan River, the power of faith - faith in the God who allows us to rise up from the cracks!

## Closing Prayer

Gracious God: you know that we are apt to bring back the troubles of yesterday, and to forecast the cares of tomorrow. Give us grace to throw off fears and anxieties, as our Lord commanded, so that today and every day we may enter into the places and spaces that you have prepared for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## Prayer of Intercession and Supplication

God of all the ages – we dwell in all the seasons of your mercy. As we find ourselves in the splendid days of summer, help us make this a time of reflection, help us to slow down, pay attention for moments of love, for moments of forgiveness, for moments of rebirth and grace. If there is sadness in our hearts, we pray that you will help us reach out to you, our living God, knowing you are always with us. If we are anxious, help us to adjust our spirits to be receptive to your comfort and calm.

Lord God hear now our prayers for those we now name silently:

--we pray for those who recover from surgery...may they be granted strength and healing,

--we pray for those who fight battles with difficult diseases and illness...may they be granted courage,

--we pray for those who are alone much of the day or who are lonely in their hearts...may they know friendship and visits by friends,

--we pray for our church in this time of transition...pray heal feelings of grief and loss helping us to be the church that continues to strive to be a demonstration of your Kingdom here on earth,

--we pray for the leaders of the nations...pray grant them wisdom, helping them walk slowly and carefully while looking for common ground and places of agreement.

We ask this prayer in the name of Jesus and with the prayer he taught us to pray, Amen.