

The St. John's Pulpit

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GOD'S LEGACY AND OURS

Joshua 4:1-7, 19-24

Third Sunday of Easter, April 30, 2017
Celebration of Second Century Legacy Campaign
The Rev. Dennis W. Foust, PhD, Senior Minister



As you know, there are moments in your life that call you to decisive commitment.
I call these 'crossing over moments.'

And your responses to 'crossing over moments' shape the rest of your life.

In fact, your responses to 'crossing over moments' shape the life of every person you influence;
your responses to 'crossing over moments' become your legacy.

This chair is placed here this morning to be a reminder and an inspiration. Let me tell you a story.

On Saturday, March 18, 1985, the sister of our St. John's members, Ellen Smith and Rod Spence, Kelly Spence Cain, was involved in a tragic automobile accident.

On that Saturday, Kelly and her best friend, Lucy, were driving to the mall.

As Lucy accelerated rushing through an intersection on a yellow light, their car was struck by an 18-wheeler flat-bed trailer truck hauling cement blocks.

The car crash almost killed Kelly and continues to alter her life.

She had to learn again how to hold a fork, how to tie her shoes, how to crawl, etc.

Kelly was among us recently presenting her autobiographical book, '*A Stranger to Myself*.'

She has also spoken to our youth.

Kelly's life was not the only one altered by the accident.

Her parent's lives changed forever on that day as did the lives of her siblings.

Ellen was a student at The University of Georgia; Rod was a high school sophomore.

Ellen has rescued her younger sister numerous times, including becoming her college room-mate.

This chair on the platform today represents one story about Rod.

On the days immediately following Kelly's accident, no visitors were allowed during the night.

So, Rod placed a chair outside Kelly's door to make sure nobody entered.

One night he prayed asking God to help him understand how he could be more helpful.

Here are Rod's words describing what he understood God to say: "*Give her to me. You have done all you can.*" Immediately, Rod felt a huge weight lift from his shoulders.

There are moments in your life that call you to decisive commitment.

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In fact, your responses to 'crossing over moments' shape the life of every person you influence;
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This morning, we read the story of Joshua and the Hebrew people.

They came to a crossing over moment; a moment of decisive commitment.

The Hebrews had been in the wilderness for at least two generations.
Only a few of those who had followed Moses fleeing Egypt were still alive.
This story is quite different than walking through the Red Sea on dry land.
Most of the Hebrews following Joshua in today's story had been born during the Exodus.
In other words, they had joined the journey along the way.
They had heard about crossing the Red Sea which is between 16 miles and 200 miles wide.
In today's scripture story, the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan River.
Even at flood stage, the Jordan River is only about 1 mile wide.
Most of the year, the Jordan is less than 100 feet across and less than 10 feet deep.
But, this story isn't really about the width or depth of the water.
This story is about God's legacy and the legacy of God's people.

Most of the crossing over stories of your life are Jordan River crossings.
You may face challenges like Rod and Ellen and their family faced on that spring day in 1985.
Those are like Red Sea crossings; deep and wide.
Most of your crossing over moments are more like Jordan River crossings; shallow and narrow.
Yet, those crossings are equally important and are impossible without commitment.
Beloved, your responses of decisive commitment become your legacy.

Do you know the significance of this Jordan River crossing?
Two generations earlier, when the Hebrews crossed the Red Sea, they escaped bondage and entered freedom; much like adolescents in high school and college begin to discover freedom.
And, understandably, it took a while for the Hebrews to learn that if you flip over the coin that says 'freedom' to the other side, you find the word, 'commitment.'
When the Hebrews crossed the Jordan River, they entered the Promised Land.
Many people live their entire lives wandering around in the land of freedom, enjoying the daily manna of God, but never make a commitment to enter the Promised Land.

In this story of the Jordan Crossing, we see the legacy of God – faithfulness – making a way.
And, in this story of the Jordan Crossing, we see the legacy of God's people – faithfulness.

God had faithfully guided the Hebrews for two generations.
Now, as they took their first steps into the Promised Land, God faithfully parted the waters.
As God made a way, God's people faithfully followed, entering the land of Promise.
From the midst of the riverbed, twelve stones were gathered and stacked as a memorial.
It was called an 'Eben-ezer;' meaning 'stone of help;' stacking faithfulness upon faithfulness.
These stones were monuments to tell stories to future generations.
The purpose of the Ebenezer was both to remind and inspire.
The Ebenezer reminded them of God's faithfulness and their decisive commitment to cross over.
The Ebenezer inspired them to tell their children stories of faithfulness and commitment.

Today, we celebrate a 'crossing over;' as we conclude our Second Century Legacy Campaign.
We stacked up some financial resources to strengthen St. John's for our second century.
We inherited ministries and facilities as part of the legacy of our ancestors.
We will tell future generations of God's faithfulness and our decisive commitments.

Beloved, it is my prayer that you will more fully grasp the significance of this ‘crossing over.’
These funds will be used in ministry and mission and in capital funding.

We will begin the second century of St. John’s in 2022.

During the 100 years of St. John’s second century, between 2022 and 2122, the earnings from the financial stones you have already set aside as endowment funds will contribute at least \$7,000,000 to offering ministries and caring for facilities.

You may have inherited a piece of land or a book or a blessing from your ancestors.

You also inherited this journey of covenant congregational life and ministry.

Now, you pass along this inheritance and your legacy to future generations.

Yet, beloved, let’s be clear about WHY we have stacked up these endowment funds.

After the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan and stacked those stones, they didn’t stay there.
They journeyed on.

The stacked stones were to remind and inspire.

Although we have stacked up some endowment fund principle, we journey on.

We will use this Second Century Legacy Campaign and endowment funds to remind and inspire.

We are crossing over into a new land of promise; God is faithful and we will be faithful.

So, look with me at the MT25 brochure distributed today.

There are seven pathways of service described here.

This brochure does not include every area of our congregational life and ministry.

What this brochure does is identify areas of ministry needing commitments today.

Yet, it is comprehensive enough to give you guidance; **in other words, it parts the waters.**

This week, please look over this brochure and take three steps on the journey:

- Pray for God’s guidance;
- Choose at least one way to participate in congregational life and ministry;
- Choose at least one way of participating in community missions.

You may wonder why we have included Congregational Community Building.

Roles such as Sunday Morning Greeters and Outreach are hospitality (‘I was a stranger.’)

We must be as committed to strengthening our congregational life and ministry as we are to feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless.

So, again choose at least one way of participating in congregational life and community missions.

We are crossing over into a new land of where being a servant church includes all of us.

Some of you will reflect on what you are now doing and renew your commitments or shift your involvement to different opportunities.

Others of you will learn of new areas of service that are new to you and offer God’s call to you.

Here is my challenge; consider this empty chair.

Imagine someone who has gone before you sitting here to remind you of God’s faithfulness.

Imagine someone coming behind you sitting here to inspire you to a legacy of faithfulness.

Imagine a person sitting here who was reached by St. John’s to experience God’s faithfulness.

Imagine a person sitting here who will be served by St. John’s in community missions.

Imagine yourself sitting here like a high school sophomore asking, “*What can I do to help?*”

Imagine God saying to you, “*Give your commitment to me. You can do no more by yourself.*”

Amen and AMEN!