

St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church--Muskego, WI

Sermon for July 29, 2018

Text: Joshua 5:13-6:5,20

Faith Doesn't Ask Why

13 Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" 14 "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"

15 The commander of the Lord's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

1 Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.

2 Then the Lord said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. 3 March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. 4 Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. 5 When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in."

20 When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city.

Faith doesn't ask why. Really? Who of us hasn't been tempted to ask, "why God?"

So much of life doesn't seem fair or right. Thousands of years ago the psalmist, Asaph, wrote a song about his "why God" moment: ***"But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills"* (Psalm 73:2-5).**

Asaph questioned why it is that people who deny God, ignore him, have no time for him...why they seem to prosper, while God's faithful people face all kinds of struggles? Asaph says that this almost caused him to lose his faith!

As a pastor, I have conversations with people facing incredible life challenges. For some of these people it seems that life only serves up one dramatic setback after another. What they are asked to deal with seems like a burden overwhelmingly larger than any human being should ever have to bear.

And I wonder: Lord, what's that deal? Why are you forcing one of your beloved children to go down such a dark road, to carry this heavy burden, to suffer so much hardship or pain

Perhaps you are that person. Your life feels overwhelming. All you want to do is stop the world and get off.

When we suggest today that faith doesn't ask why, we need to understand what we don't mean. We don't mean that Christians are not going to wrestle at times with God's will. Remember the apostle Paul's thorn in the flesh? ***"In order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me"* (2 Corinthians 12:7,8).** We don't know exactly what that thorn was. A speech impediment? Poor

eyesight? Whatever it was, Paul's wondering, "Lord, what are you doing? I'm your servant. I'm doing your work. Why are you burdening me with this frustrating affliction?"

Sometimes, Christians give the impression that having faith means you'll simply accept whatever God brings into your life without asking why. But that's only going to happen if we have a perfect faith—which is never going to happen. Plus, this kind of thinking can cause believers to experience an identity crisis when they do have faith struggles. We wonder: "If I'm questioning God, am I really a believer?"

As human beings God built into us a natural curiosity, a longing to understand, to question things in order to make sense of our lives and the world in which we're living. When we become Christians, we can't just turn off our brains.

Faith doesn't ask why doesn't mean that God wants us stumbling blindly through life, not even attempting to think through and understand what and why certain things are happening.

Take Joshua for example. He was given some strange instructions. "March around the city for seven days, blowing trumpets." What kind of crazy battle plan is that? But the Lord doesn't leave Joshua hanging. God shares the why: "***See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands***" (***Joshua 6:3***). Joshua, I'm asking you to do this because I want to make it crystal clear to you, to my people, to everyone, that I'm fighting this battle for you, that I'm the power behind this victory, that you can trust me. I will deliver you.

When we insist that faith doesn't ask why, we are in danger of shutting people down, denying them the opportunity to wrestle a little with God. Remember when Jacob wrestled with God? What was the point? God was molding, shaping, strengthening Jacob, preparing him for the next chapter of his life journey.

When I counsel married couples, I remind them that it is in the times of conflict that their relationship will grow the most. Conflict forces us to stop and listen, to rethink, to see the scenario from a different perspective, to better understand our spouse and where he or she is coming from.

So, yes, faith needs to ask why. It needs to wrestle with God's will because his ways are not our ways and we need to come to grips with that. It's in the wrestling that we begin to know and understand God better. It's in the wrestling that we get a new perspective of where he's coming from. It's in the wrestling that our eyes are opened to the height, the depth, and the breadth of how his love is working in our lives.

With that in mind, I would encourage us not to shut people down when they question God. Instead, we should welcome the conversation. People need to talk through their struggles with God. What could be better than working through it with other believers. Then they can see and understand why we put our faith in God, why we're willing to struggle, suffer, persevere, why faith doesn't ask why.

Faith doesn't ask why. Really!

Oops! Now it sounds like I'm contradicting myself. But, it's true. Faith doesn't ask why. I mean, that's the definition of faith, right? Faith is complete trust. But what does that actually mean?

Perhaps we should start with the question: what is faith? Some call the Christian faith "blind faith." But is our faith really "blind"? I don't think so. We have a reason, we have a "why," in fact, probably a couple thousand "whys" for putting our faith in God and in Christ.

What if I were to say to you I have faith that I can get into my car and drive 120 mph into a solid wall and I will live to see another day. You'd say that I was acting incredibly foolishly, that my blind faith was going to get me killed. Well, guess what? We get into our cars. We drive 60-70 mph down the

highway all the time. Coming at us from the opposite direction are all kinds of vehicles, cars, huge trucks at speeds of 60-70 mph. There's only a couple of feet separating both lanes of traffic. If the driver of the oncoming vehicle were to swerve into our lane, that would be the end for us.

But we don't think or worry about that. Why? Blind faith? Not really. It's experience. We've driven on the highway hundreds of times and it's never happened to us before.

Joshua's faith was bolstered by his experiences in life. He saw, he experienced the kind of power the Lord has and what the Lord can do. Joshua was there (probably pretty young at the time, but he was there) when God brought the 10 plagues down on Egypt, when he split the Red Sea in half and God's people walked through on dry ground. Joshua saw and experienced God's miraculous preservation those forty years in the wilderness. Joshua's faith wasn't blind. He repeatedly witnessed the power and the love of God with his very own eyes.

Some of you might be thinking. "I'm not Joshua. I didn't walk through the Red Sea on dry ground. I haven't experienced the power and love of God like that." Yes and no.

When we read the account, it's like we were there. Think about this. Can we relate to the horrors the Jews experienced during WWII? Do we believe they suffered atrociously? Of course, we do. Were we there? No. But we've seen pictures. Reputable people have shared the accounts. Even though we weren't there, what we've seen and heard impacts and changes our lives.

That's why God inspired and preserved this book (the Bible). It contains hundreds of real life accounts of real live people who have really seen and experienced God's power and love in action.

Faith doesn't ask why means we see and we hear what God has done in the past. How, over and over again, he said he'd do something and he did it. God said he'd deliver his people from slavery. God said that he'd preserve them in their journey through the wilderness. From our human perspective there were many times when it looked to his people like it just wasn't happening. But in the end God always did what he said. These examples of God's faithfulness inspired confidence in Joshua and gave him his unshakeable faith.

It's important for us to remember that the Bible is a book filled with events that are just as real as the what's going on in your life right now. These are people like you and me telling their stories. In this age of cinema, I think sometimes it's hard to know what's real and what's not. The Bible is filled with reputable eye-witness accounts. Jesus' miracles, his death, his resurrection, are real, absolutely! My prayer is that they may be as real to me and to you as the person sitting next to you right now. (Go ahead and give that person a little poke just to make sure he or she is real!).

But you know, it's not just the real experiences of the real people we find in God's Word that make him real to us. When we take him at his Word and do what he says, even when it doesn't seem to make sense, God is going to become even more real to us.

Again, think of Joshua. March around the city for seven days and blow the trumpets? Really Lord? A couple days earlier the Lord had told Joshua to get all the people lined up to cross the Jordan River. The river was at flood stage, incredibly dangerous. God tells Joshua to have the priests lead the way with the ark of the covenant. "Just start walking into the river." That was the command. It could have been a disastrous leadership move. But Joshua did it. And God kept his word. (Check it out. Joshua, chapter 3).

The point is every time we take God at his word, we experience once again his power and love in action and our faith is strengthened.

Do we want an unshakeable faith? Then we need to do what God tells us to do, even when it doesn't make sense, especially when it doesn't make sense!

God says: “Have your pastor apply a few drops of water to your child’s head in the name of the Triune God and know that your child is immediately redeemed, renewed, safe in my arms. Eat a little bread. Drink a little wine and know that through it I have strengthened and refreshed you for the journey—even if you don’t feel any different.

“Feed on my Word and [even though much of what it says seems a mystery to you] my Word will change your heart and your life. Work on your marriage rather than give up and know that I will bless you for it. Wrestle with the demons of your addiction, your illicit sexual cravings, your fears that you don’t have enough and, in one way or another, I will give you victory.

When faith doesn’t ask why, when faith does what God’s says, God’s Spirit strengthens us as he shows us what he can and will do, as he proves yet again that he always does what he says he’ll do and he always acts for our ultimate good.

Just this past week I heard about a conversation someone had with a cancer survivor in our congregation. About two years ago, she was told that she didn’t have long to live. It’s been a rough and incredibly difficult journey for her. Yet, she’s convinced now that that cancer has made her faith real to her in a way that it couldn’t have ever been without the struggle.

Because she can’t always make it to church, she watches us online every weekend. If she doesn’t do that, if she doesn’t read her Bible or do her daily devotion, she says it becomes too easy to lose hold of the truth that ultimately God used her struggle to bless her. Through her God has given us yet another picture of his power and his love and how he goes about giving us the gift of an unshakeable faith.

Lord, give us such a faith as this! Amen.

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