

Welcome everyone! I am so glad you decided to join us today. And I just want to say how excited I am for the hope of seeing everyone again, in person, *soon*. I want to thank you for your graciousness, your kindness, and your flexibility as we have been navigating these new waters, trying to make wise decisions for both our church as well as our community.

In light of that, I'd love to give you an update on where we are at in terms of re-gathering again as a church family. We are holding this date loosely, but we are targeting August 2nd as the relaunch date for The Creek. We have chosen that date with several factors in mind: first, we have been working on a united front with over a dozen of the larger churches throughout our city, and that was the consensual decision of an ideal date. So, we are moving forward in unity because we want to be great partners with our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout Indianapolis as we together try to reach our city for Jesus.

Second, we are also wanting to walk in step with our school systems. The weekend of August 2nd will be the first Sunday when schools are back in session. And if our local leaders and healthcare professionals are supportive of 30 students being together in a classroom, we can probably feel safe about our kids being together in classrooms at church, as well. If the most informed leaders in our community feel good about a thousand students gathering together at high school, we can feel safe about a thousand people gathering together at church, as well.

Now, the reality is that there is no perfect date. No matter what day we chose, some will think it's too early, others will say it's too late. We believe - all things considered - that August 2nd is the best decision we can make. If you are not ready to get out and join us in person at that time for any reason, we are going to continue with our online services for the foreseeable future, so you don't have to worry about missing out on anything!

Though August 2nd is not tomorrow, it's only 7 weekends away! And I want you to know that between now and then, we are planning some meaningful, fun, and engaging worship opportunities for you and for our community. We are still finalizing the details, but what we are hoping to do, on at least a couple occasions, is to hold live worship services in our parking lot so we can be together in person while outside!

On the weekends that we are not able to do that, we want to encourage you to do watch parties as life groups - or if you are not yet in a life group, with friends of yours from church, or maybe even your neighbors! I was at a watch party just last Sunday with a life group in our church, and it was so great to worship alongside 15 or 20 other people, take in the service together, and then share a meal and enjoy fellowship with one another. The encouragement of worshipping alongside other people again could not be put in words. Please! Connect with people and do service together. Let's open up our homes, open up our backyards, and connect with one another.

We also want to have a night of worship mid-week, where we can gather together as it begins to get cooler outside, at 7:00 or 7:30, read Scripture together, pray with one another, and lift our voices to the Lord!

As more details are locked in for those events over the summer, we'll keep you posted on specifics as soon as we can. And again, I want to say thank you. I have so many friends in ministry whose churches have become divided during this time. They are getting negative emails, critical comments posted online, folks leaving the church. The enemy has been taking advantage of this crisis to cause division, and relational unhealth is wreaking havoc - which is just heartbreaking to hear about. One of my ministry friends asked me a few weeks ago how many negative emails and phone calls I've had so far, assuming it was at least dozens if not hundreds. I just laughed and said, "Not a single one." Not one. People have reached out with expressions of encouragement, of gratitude, of prayer, of support, of love. And even when people have disagreed, they have really just been asking questions in a spirit-led, kind way, motivated by a desire of unity. When I told my friend that he said, "That's not possible. Churches like that don't exist." Luckily, they do! God's grace has been upon us as a congregation. We are so thankful to him for making it possible, and I am so thankful to *you* for making that possible, as well.

Turning the corner just a bit - last week, in light of everything that has been going on in our country, we prayed for our black community, as well as for the healing of our culture and our city during this time. Today, I want us to continue in that direction and pray for leaders in our government and for our police officers and other first responders who have one of the hardest jobs around right now, and ask for God's grace, guidance, and wisdom. Would you join me as we pray?

We are in a series on the book of Joshua called *Taking New Ground*. We are talking about the areas in our life where we want to see new territory claimed for the glory of God, we are talking about the callings God has placed on our lives, the good plans he has for our future, and the great things he wants to accomplish in us and through us. In the first week we said the pathway for us to press into the inheritance God has for us is to pursue God's presence, prioritize God's word, and live with courage. Last week, as we read the story of Rahab, we were encouraged by her faith in God, and we were called to place our faith in him, as well. Today, as the Israelites are getting ready to enter the Promised Land, we are going to see the miraculous way that God paves the path for his people. If you have your Bible, will you turn with me to Joshua 3? We'll start reading in verse 1:

Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. After three days the officers went throughout the camp, giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about two thousand cubits between you and the ark; do not go near it." Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you."

There are several elements I want to point out about this passage to help us understand it better. First, we are told that Joshua was with all the Israelites, which is somewhere between 1.5 and 2 *million* people - basically the entire population of the Indy metropolitan area. For a visual, think about the million-man march. Many of us have seen these photos, the great expanse of humanity, gathered together in one place. That's what the Israelites looked like. And they were camped next to

the Jordan river for three days. You can see where the Israelites were at on this map - the only thing between them and the land God had promised them was that river.

It was springtime, and that river was at flood stage, running higher and faster than any other time of the year. If they were at a different section of the river, or if it was a different time of the year, it would have been possible to ford. But this spot, at this time of year, they had no chance...which I think was part of God's perfect design. He could have brought them to the Jordan during the dry season, and he could have brought them to a different part of the Jordan, but he brought them to this *specific* place at this *specific* time, because he had a deeper purpose in mind. God's goal wasn't just to get his people to a different place physically - across the Jordan - God's goal was to also to get his people to a different place *spiritually* - to the place where all their faith and all their trust was entirely in him. That's why God brought them to that specific place at that specific time.

Maybe you are thinking about certain times in your life, maybe a time that you are in right now, where something that you thought should have been easy, something you thought should have been almost effortless, has proven insurmountable in your own strength.

Maybe it's your ability to forgive that person in your life who wronged you. You want to just get over it and move on and be at peace, but no matter how hard you try, you can't. You need God to make a way.

Maybe it's your ability to be done with that habit once and for all (gossiping, pornography, drinking, partying). You thought you'd be able to just try really hard and then it would be over with, but the waters have risen too high and they are moving too fast for you to cross over on your own. You need God to make a way.

Maybe it's that situation with your family, that healing in your marriage, that challenge at work, that financial burden...sometimes we come to a river and we don't have what it takes to get across. Here me on this, this is so important! God's goal isn't just to bring us *across* that river, to help us *overcome* that obstacle, his goal is to get our *hearts and lives to the place where we depend and rely upon him fully and for everything*.

The Bible tells us that the Israelites were camped there at that river for three days. Long enough for the reality of the impossibility to set in. And then, all of a sudden, with no bridge having been laid, with no dam having been built, with no real explanation at all, the people were told, "Pack up your things, we're crossing the river."

Now, put yourself in that situation, and try to imagine what the people are thinking: "Seriously?! What do you mean we're going to cross the river? There's no way. But hey, it looks like everyone else is packing up and getting ready, so let's get our things and see what happens." The only instructions they were given: "Follow the ark."

If you remember last fall, Tom did a great job teaching about the ark, the golden box that represented the dwelling place of God among them, God's presence in their midst. Here's why they were told to follow the ark of God, I love the rationale. In 3:4 they are told follow the ark, because "you have never been this way before." Translation: "No offense, but this is not one of those things you can do

on your own, you don't have the know-how, you don't have the expertise, you don't have the resources...but that's okay, God does. All you have to do is follow the leading of the Lord, and he will guide you to a place you've never been."

Think about how relevant that is for us today! Maybe you just graduated college and there are not a lot of job openings in light of the COVID crisis. You are beginning to feel uncertain and insecure. *You've never been this way before. One step at a time, follow the leading of the Lord.*

Maybe you just gave your life to Christ and you are realizing that living as a follower of Jesus is harder than you thought. Your friends are telling you to come party with them. Someone from a past relationship is looking for a hookup. You feel the strong pull back to your former way of life, but you also want to be different, to be better, to be new. *You've never been this way before. One step at a time, follow the leading of the Lord.*

Maybe things in your marriage are really difficult right now. More difficult than they've ever been. You're not sure what to do, not sure if you have what it takes to make this marriage work. You don't want a broken family, broken dreams. But you are losing hope. *You've never been this way before. One step at a time, follow the leading of the Lord.*

That's what the Israelites are called to do. They don't know which way to turn, they don't know how they are going to get across the river, but one step at a time, they followed the leading of the Lord. But before they packed up and started the journey, there was one important step they had to take. In verse 5 they were told, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you." Before the Israelites could enter into the promised land, they needed to consecrate themselves.

That word consecrate means to set apart, to devote to special purposes, to make holy. The word in Hebrew is *kadosh*, and it is used 172 times in the Old Testament. The first time *kadosh* appears is in Genesis 2. When God created the world in six days, he rested on the 7th day and made the 7th day holy. The seventh day was set apart from the other days, it was different from the other days. It wasn't a day for work, it was a day for rest. *Kadosh*.

*Kadosh* is then used in the book of Exodus, in chapter 19 - God's people have been set free from slavery, they have been brought to Mt. Sinai, to the place where they will receive the ten commandments and enter into a covenant relationship with God. But before they can receive the commandments, before they can enter into that covenant relationship, what does God tell them? Exodus 19:10: "Consecrate yourselves!" *Kadosh* yourselves. Make yourselves holy. Be different than the world around you. Set yourselves apart for God, and for God alone.

Here's what I want us to realize: God wants his people to be set apart for him, to be different, to be holy. God said he was going to do amazing things among them, literally in the Hebrew, he said, "The Lord is going to astound you." If we want to see God do amazing things among us, if we want to see his power at work through us, if we want to be astounded by him, it oftentimes begins by consecrating ourselves, by saying, "God, I'm not going to live my life for any random purpose, I'm not going to live it for my own purpose, I want to live it for you and for your purpose. And so I renounce pride and pursue humility, I renounce anger and pursue peace, I renounce greed and pursue

generosity, I renounce envy and pursue celebration, I renounce selfishness and pursue love, in this moment we could say I renounce racism or bigotry and pursue equality and justice.” If we want to take new ground and enter into the promises God has for us, it begins by becoming people who are fully committed to God and are consecrated, who are set apart for his purposes. Do you remember the question asked by the psalmist in Psalm 24:3? “Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart.” Those who have consecrated themselves.

So the Israelites consecrated themselves to God and then they followed after him, right to the water’s edge, and then look at what we read, starting in 3:14, “So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water’s edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

Just as God promised, the he did amazing things that day. A river in flood stage dried up, and they walked over the riverbed on dry ground. Two elements to point out: first, the river wasn’t dry when they got there, the priests had to *actually* step into the river before the flow was cut off. That’s significant, because sometimes people say to God, “Hey God, once you provide the miracle, then I’ll step forward in faith.” But God says, “You have the order turned backward. I’m calling *you* to step forward in faith, then *I’ll* do the miracle.”

God, please bless me financially, increase my income, increase my net worth, THEN I’ll start being more generous and giving to the kingdom. That’s not the way it works. You start giving, you start putting God first, you bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, then you watch to see the way he blessed you. It’s those who are faithful with a few things that are put in charge of many.”

God, please solve this relational conflict, might this person I’m at odds with realize the error of their ways and apologize to me. If they do that, THEN I’ll be gracious and extend forgiveness. And God says, “What if you switched up the order? What if you began by being gracious, what if you forgave them from the outset, what if you went to them in love and humility, seeking not to be right, seeking not to be justified, seeking not for them to apologize to you, but simply seeking unity and restoration, even at personal cost? That’s God’s path to reconciliation.

Are we willing to put our feet into the river, even when it is still at flood stage? Are we willing to obey God, follow God, even when we can’t see the miracle he is getting ready to give? That’s where true faith comes into play. That’s the first element: the profound faith they had, stepping into the river when the water was still rushing.

The second element is where the water stopped - not right there in front of them, not a few hundred yards in the distance where they could see it, but in the town of Adam, 45 miles north of them. Could you imagine stepping into a river here in Indianapolis and as soon as you do, as soon as the

soles of your feet hit the water, the river dries up, and then you find out later on that the flow of the river was stopped all the way up in Kokomo? What would that tell you? Coincidence? Lucky timing? Of course not. It would tell you that God was sovereignly orchestrating every aspect and element of the event, making the miracle perfect, even from miles and miles away. Which leaves us with this truth to consider. You never know the work that God is doing on your behalf, upstream. Let me say that again: you never know the work that God is doing on your behalf, upstream. Because we are only human, because we don't even know what's going to happen tomorrow, because we can't see around the corner, oftentimes we end up discouraged and dejected, feeling God has all but abandoned us, that we are in this all alone. Nothing could be further from the truth! Even when we can't see it, he's working, he's damming up waters 45 miles to the north, getting ready to do things that will astound us, the moment we consecrate ourselves to him, follow his lead, and step forward in faith.

Many of you know that Keren and I had two miscarriages early on in our marriage. The doctors weren't sure what was going on, which didn't give us any direction or hope. And then we found out she was pregnant again, for the third time. We were excited, and at the same time we were really scared, all but expecting to lose our baby again. Just days after we found out Keren was expecting, all the elders of our church were over at our house for a meal - we were actually going through Rooted together as a group. We told them the good news and asked them to pray for us. They made a circle around us, laid their hands on us, asked God to move. And so clearly during that prayer I felt God say to me: 40 weeks. 40 weeks. You are going to have 40 weeks. When did Keren go into labor? At noon, on her due date, exactly 40 weeks. When I look at Hudson, when I look at my little boy, I know God was working upstream, I felt him promise in that moment to bring us through. And down to the very moment, he did.

Many of you know that Keren and I are expecting our second child, a little baby girl. Just a few weeks ago I was going back through my phone, looking for a note I had made months earlier back in the fall. And I came across a note simply by accident that was entitled Dream. I was curious so I opened it up, and I had written: "Last night, October 15, I had a dream that Keren told me she was pregnant." I had forgotten about that dream until I read about it on that note. So as I'm reading that note that I had written months early I called across the room to Keren, "Hey babe, what's your due date again?" October 15th. Coincidence? Maybe. Or perhaps, God was working upstream, months before our baby was conceived, to encourage us, to remind us that he is sovereign over our family, family over this baby's life, that he has plans for our precious little girl.

I could tell you story after story from my life. But instead I want to ask you to pause and consider: where do you think God might be working upstream in your life right now, what are places he is active, places he is moving powerfully on your behalf, that even though you can't see it now, will show up in your life next week, or next month, or next year, or next decade? God is so sovereign. He is so loving. He is so good. And he is always at work in our lives, even working in advance, to do things that will astound us, things that will make us say, "Are you kidding me?! Wow! Only God!"

Let's jump back to the story. The water piled up, the people walked through the river on dry ground, and then God gave them a really important instruction. If you look with me in Joshua 4, God told the Israelites to take one man from each of the twelve tribes, to go back into the dry river bed, pick up a large stone, carry it out, and set it up as a lasting reminder of his provision. With that command

given by God, this is what Joshua told the Israelites in 4:5: “Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.” *These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.* This wasn’t just a great miracle. This wasn’t just God working upstream and making a way, this was God giving his people, one generation after another, a reminder of his power, of his love, of his grace at work in their lives.

It is so incredible when God shows up, but if we aren’t intentional and purposeful, we’ll forget. Even true, incredible miracles we lose sight of with the tyranny of the urgent, we just move on to the next thing. So God had them set up these stones so that every time they looked at them, they would be compelled to remember his faithfulness, his provision, his love. And we ought to do the same things in our lives, today.

Earlier in the service our host asked you to find a pen and piece of paper. If you have those, get them out now. If you don’t have a pen and paper, open up a note on your phone. We want to spend a few minutes setting up our own stones, writing down and listing out areas in our lives where we were stuck, where we couldn’t cross the river on our own, and where God made a way. He did something that astounded us. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind expressions of God’s grace over the course of your life, and then, one by one, write them down. And here’s the plan, so we can remember them: I want to encourage you to put this list somewhere you’ll see it all week long, maybe even for the rest of the month, the rest of the summer, the rest of the year, that’s up to you. A bathroom mirror, a refrigerator, in your car. If it’s a note on your phone, maybe make it your home screen for the week. And if you are going to be meeting with your life group this week, share some of those stones, those expressions of God’s faithfulness with them, invite them into places in your life where God showed up, and together give him praise and glory.

God is so good to us. He is working on our behalf, opening doors, and making a way. Let’s remember what he’s done and honor him for it. Take some time, right now, and list the things you are thankful to God for doing for you, and then we’ll continue with worship, and after the song, we’ll have time to remember the ultimate way God has provided for us, his ultimate miracle to bring us into the promised land. We’ll take communion as we remember the life and death of his Son, Jesus Christ.

With the time and space you have right now, let’s write down how God has faithfully provided for us and made a way, where there seemed to be no way.