Stones of Remembrance

For 50th Annniversary Makeover Campaign Celebration Sunday

# Scripture:  Joshua 4:1-9; Eph. 3:7-21

# Three parts – Yesterday, Today, Forever - Play Theme Song - In 2nd Sing hymn – Yesterday, Today, Forever, Jesus Is the Same.

# Key Thought: Just as God asked Israel to remember his faithfulness and talk about it so that it would continue to inspire them to follow Him, so we are remembering God’s faithfulness in our lives and our church and asking God to help us continue to follow Him.

# Intro idea: pile of stones

The Adirondacks you see stones everywhere. Every once in a while, near a trail or special spot, there is an intentional pile of stones. Someone has clearly put them there as a marker of some kind. The English word for a pile of rocks used as a marker is a cairn. Cairns are frequently used by hikers as trail markers above the tree line. Here's a picture of a hiker posing by such a trail marker. Cairns have also often been used and still are in some cultures as burial place markers. Here's a picture of a large rock pile built by veterans visiting the battlefield at Wilson's Creek in Missouri after the Civil War where Union General Nathaniel Lyon was killed. Much like the biblical story, this rock pile was raised to remember and memorialize a particular event.

# Remember what God has done

## Israel

The children of Israel are at another defining moment in their history. They have a new leader. Moses has gone, Joshua is in charge. They are ready to cross another body of water. Before it was the Red Sea; now it is the flood swollen Jordan River. They are facing another stern military test. Before it was the pursuing armies of Pharaoh; now it is the looming fortress of Jericho, the first of the cities of Canaan to stand in the way of claiming the land that God had given them. But there is one big difference. When the children of Israel reached the Red Sea, Moses was already a proven instrument of God. God had shown repeatedly that he would demonstrate his power through Moses in the matter of the ten plagues sent upon Egypt. On the other hand Joshua the new leader at the Jordan River was unproven. There is a looming question in their minds. God had been with Moses; would he be with Joshua? That was the real question that needed to be answered. God answered it definitively giving Joshua directions for crossing the Jordan and then rolling back the Jordan even as he had the Red Sea. He helped the Israelites to cross over on dry ground just as he had helped them to cross through the sea. There was something else that was different about this crossing. The site of this crossing would be a part of their permanent place to live. So, to remember this deliverance he instructed the people to take stones from middle of the river and pile them up on other side where they had arrived as a memorial to God's deliverance. Whenever their children saw the pile of stones and asked about it, they were to instruct their children about how God had delivered them. This pile of stones would be a physical reminder of God's faithfulness.

## Us

This instruction by God to build a memorial teaches us a valuable lesson. The lesson is to mark in our lives those times when God especially meets us. We need to remember them. Perhaps we remember the place and the place becomes a marker for us. Perhaps we write the story down and the testimony, the Journal entry, becomes a permanent remembrance. Perhaps we recount to others the story of God's deliverance whenever we have the opportunity and we try to make opportunity to do so. This recounting creates a memorial. Perhaps we, like the Israelites create a physical memorial of some kind to God's faithfulness, as a reminder of what God has done.

The New Testament includes numerous encouragements for Christians to remember. For example, in Ephesians 2:11-13 Paul urges the Christians to remember the change that happened from before they are Christians to after they were Christians. In Ephesians 3:1-9, Paul lists many of the blessings that we have as Christians to remind us. Paul Peter and Jude all encourage Christians to remember what they had been taught (2 Timothy 2:8, 2 Peter 1:15, Jude 17). In Revelation, the church Sardis is urged to remember what they had “received and heard” (3:3).

Ps 77:11-12 “I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. 12 I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds. NIV

This 50th anniversary celebration of our church is such a memorial to God's faithfulness. It gives us opportunity to remember all that God has done for us – both for our church and for us personally in the past. We have an opportunity to celebrate God's faithfulness. Most importantly, remembering inspires us to continue to serve God in the future. Just as the purpose of the pile of stones was to inspire future generations to know about God's faithfulness and to serve him; so the purpose of our testimony, the purpose of our remembrance, is to tell others of God save us and allow the memories of our thankfulness to continue to inspire us to serve God and to inspire future generations also to serve him.

This morning, I would like you to participate in this exercise of remembering. You are going to create stones of remembrance of your own this morning. That is what the sheet is for that is in your bulletin. There are 10 blanks there for you to fill in special things that God has done in your life, mile markers in your own spiritual history, or special blessings in our church’s history that remind you of God's faithfulness, that encourage you to continue to serve him, that are an inspiration to you and that you would like to talk to your children or grandchildren about in the hope that it would also inspire them.

# Be aware of where God is working now

## Israel

If the children of Israel looked only in the rearview mirror at what God had done through the great leader Moses, they would have stalled on the bank of the Jordan. They needed to become aware of what God was doing now in their present time. For God was at work empowering and guiding Joshua, working in the new generation of Israelites, giving instructions for the taking of the land, the conquering of Jericho, and the establishing of the nation in the territory that God had promised to Abraham.

## Us

It is very important to see for us as well that God is just as faithful to move in our present as he was to move in the past. Ephesians 3:10 tells us that God's purpose is currently being worked out through the church. Though we do not understand the scope of what we are being told in that verse, we can see plainly that God is now at work in ways that we can only imagine. He is using you and me and all of us together to demonstrate all the world and even to the spiritual realm what his church should be and his great wisdom in the way he works in our world. Now that's a challenge to ask ourselves if our life is demonstrating God's wisdom. Is our local church a demonstration of the wisdom of God? Well, none of us are finished products yet but that's what God is working at. Jn 5:17 Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." NIV Henry T Blackaby and Claude King in the book *Experiencing God* list seven realities of experiencing God. The very first one is, “God is always at work around you” (p. 33). He wants to use our lives to accomplish his great purposes in the universe. He did not stop working with the apostolic age. Miracles did not end with Paul or John. God is still at work displaying his power, changing lives, encouraging the hopeless, strengthening the weak, and giving holy purpose to the distracted. The book that Joanne is writing the 50 stories of God's faith in us through the lives of people in our church-- I've been editing stories for her; and the one great fact that I come away convinced of more than ever it is that God is at work every day every week in mighty ways that we have no concept of. The problem is that in our daily mundane existence we are not aware of God's work. We focus on what we can investigate with our five senses; what relates to our daily vocation; and what brings us pleasure.

We need to take time to stop and listen to God's Holy Spirit. We need to let him instruct us as to what he is doing in our own lives and in our congregation right now. So on the sheet that I passed out, have given you a section to write down what you are aware that God is working on in your own life and in our church right now. You probably can't fill in all five blanks right now, and that's all right. It takes time and prayer for us to sense what God is doing in our lives. But if we make no effort to be aware, we will go on living without even thinking about it. And we will miss out on knowing some of the most important facts about our lives.

# Have faith for the future

## Israel

For Israel it was crucial that their faith be made strong to face the challenges that they would soon meet. Jericho was a heavily fortified city. It was the first test that they would face militarily. It would set the tone for the campaign that followed. God would further test their faith at the walls of Jericho by instructing them only to march around the city and not even attack it. Would they wait and obey his instructions? Would they have done so had they not seen him act on their behalf in the crossing of the Jordan? Lastly he talked about how crossing the Jordan was a test of faith and the faith builder for the people of Israel.

## Us

Look again with me at the book of Ephesians chapter 3 verse 20 and 21. These verses are written to stretch your faith. That was the focus of Pastor Eric's message last week. So I thought I would give you a chance to write based on what you've been thinking about this week. Based on what God has already done in your life; based on the fact that you know God is at work in the present; you know that God will be at work in your future as well. In addition, he has promised that his work in the future has potential that you cannot even imagine. So I ask you what you having faith for in your own walk with God? Where are the areas in which God is challenging your faith? What are you having faith for regarding our congregation? I have a section there for you to mark down things that God is asking you to have faith for in the future. Again you may not write down all of them this morning and that's okay but I encourage you to start thinking about it and praying about it. It is important as Christians that we have a sense of anticipation of what God wants to do. The people of God are always the people marked with expectation that God is going to act. It does not mean that we do not act in fact it encourages us to act all the more to be about God's business. I know I said long enough that score the pic