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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
JULY 8, 2007
PASTOR MARK FRY

1 PASTOR MARK FRY: We've got some Sunday school kids
2 that are going to be blessed by their teachers at this time
3 and then next week and the following weeks they'll all be in
4 with us, we'll all be learning together and doing the Bible
5 school stuff together.

6 As they go we will pray for their teachers and their
7 learning as we do the same hopefully here as we do some
8 teaching and some learning. So let's pray.

9 Lord, thank you that you are the teacher, that when
10 your word is opened, it opens hearts.

11 And so, Lord, bless our Sunday school students and
12 us as your learners.

13 Lord, would you give faithful teachers your words,
14 myself included. In Jesus' name. Amen.

15 I have a couple of these little Luis Palau things.
16 I just wanted to remind you that thing is next weekend.

17 It's going to be a great experience. All day
18 Saturday, basically starts at 1:00 o'clock, and all day
19 Sunday, starts again at 1:00.

20 I invite you to go down and participate in that and,
21 kind of a prophetic reminder, it's not really about us as
22 Christians; it is an outreach to folks who don't know who
23 Jesus is and I was honored to be part of a training of a
24 wonderful dozen disciples a couple weeks ago that are going
25 to be counselors down at that.

1 So they are expecting 70,000 to 80,000 people. It's
2 going to be a big event in Omaha, so take part in that, get
3 your cup filled up a bit.

4 We are going to be looking at a story today from
5 Joshua.

6 Joshua is not often enough I guess read by us. It's
7 a wonderful book of the Bible.

8 In my Bible it's found on page 196. I would love
9 for you to bring your own Bible, you could write in it and
10 make some notes in the margins of that.

11 But you can use ours in the meantime. We're glad
12 you're using that, because this really is a prophetic text
13 this morning and I want to briefly open that text.

14 Then I want to put another event alongside it and
15 then some of the context of this and then come back together.

16 So, from Joshua 1, "After the death of Moses, the
17 servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua, son of Nun,
18 Moses' assistant, saying my servant Moses is dead.

19 "Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this
20 people, into the land that I'm giving to them, to the
21 Israelites, every place the soul of your foot will tread upon
22 I have given to you as I promised to Moses."

23 We are going to pause right there, because what we
24 need to understand is a great leader is dead now and his
25 boots are enormous for somebody to fill.

1 Joshua is Moses' assistant, and we need to just
2 understand a little bit of where the story has been.

3 If you have any familiarity at all with the Bible,
4 Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are the
5 five books of the law.

6 Moses is said to have authored all of that. He is a
7 man of words, a powerful leader.

8 A lot of us know some of the story of Moses, the
9 exodus when he leads the Israelites through the Red Sea out
10 of bondage from Pharaoh.

11 He gives the people the Ten Commandments. He
12 survives the ten plagues.

13 He leads the people all the way through the
14 wilderness wandering and bread comes from heaven and water
15 from rocks and all this wonderful stuff is happening for
16 Moses, but now you see Moses is dead.

17 And Moses' right hand man is Joshua and Joshua needs
18 to take the people across the river to the new future. So
19 we'll come back to that in a moment.

20 I want to share with you a real exciting time that
21 we had as a church community.

22 The first of the year you may remember when Mike
23 Breen was with us.

24 Mike is our friend from England that comes and
25 teaches us, we are in a partnership with his ministry, it's

1 called 3DM, Three Dimensional Ministry, which has to do with
2 living a balanced life of the up, the in, and out.

3 And Mike was with us, it was the last week of
4 January, he did some teaching and preached on Sunday morning.

5 But on Friday night and all day Saturday we had a
6 retreat down at Camp Carol Joy Holling down in Ashland.

7 And on Friday night we had a wonderful meal together
8 and Mike was teaching us about how we listen for God's voice,
9 and God speaks to us in three different ways.

10 Sometimes visually, sometimes audibly, and sometimes
11 through feelings.

12 And one of the women at the 7:45 service came up to
13 me after the service and she shared with me, she said, "I've
14 heard God speak to me."

15 And I said, "What did he say?"

16 "Oh, we need to have coffee. I'll tell you about
17 it."

18 I said, "I would love that."

19 But, see, we believe God speaks to us. I have had
20 the privilege of hearing God's voice a few different times in
21 my life.

22 But God speaks to us in those three different ways,
23 visually, audibly, or through feelings.

24 And we were practicing some of that Friday night
25 with Mike and he was conducting the Bible study how everybody

1 is wired this way, it's just sometimes we aren't paying
2 attention and we aren't maybe looking or listening or feeling
3 in the presence of the Spirit, but God is alive.

4 He's not dead. He's not just some history story.
5 It's a present day reality.

6 The kingdom is near. So we need to access that. We
7 need to listen.

8 So we are going through this and there are about
9 seventy of us there, there were some church council people
10 there, people from our staff, leaders that had the weekend
11 available, and so we are going through this listening
12 exercise.

13 And Mike says, start telling me some of the things
14 that you sense God is telling you.

15 And you see on the screen what some of that was.
16 It's kind of hard to read, Mike's penmanship is horrible, but
17 he was being the recorder.

18 And at the very top will you'll notice it says
19 Joshua 3-4. Barb Frye, she's on our church council, she
20 said, "I don't know why, God is saying to me Joshua 3-4. I
21 don't know what it is."

22 We get the Bibles out the first thing out of the
23 gate and we look at Joshua 3:4.

24 It says, "So that you may know the way you should
25 go, for you have not passed this way before."

1 We were like this is cool. A new direction. We've
2 never been this way before.

3 And then other people start sharing these different
4 pictures and different things that they sensed God was
5 telling them.

6 Someone mentioned planned intimate time. They
7 wanted to do better at listening to God, to grow in their
8 listening skill.

9 Somebody else wanted to be closer to the Lord, to
10 grow in that intimacy.

11 Somebody said they wanted peace without fear.

12 Somebody else wanted to feel Jesus.

13 Somebody else wanted to learn and yearn and practice
14 what we were just learning, they wanted to keep that
15 consistently in their life.

16 Mike is writing on the board, he's writing them down
17 as the people are talking.

18 These are the same things, but what I've done is
19 I've written them so that you can kind of see them a little
20 bit more plainly.

21 And we were down there, trust, feel, to go forward,
22 to be released into tears.

23 Somebody shared that it had been years and years,
24 that they had a grief they needed to get over, so they wanted
25 to be able to cry. This is powerful stuff.

1 So he talked about a mountain top forest, to trust
2 and to feel, to learn and yearn and practice.

3 Somebody mentioned that children's ministry needs to
4 be taken over by many people. He wrote that down. It's a
5 very interesting word.

6 Someone else had said there is a sense of fire about
7 our confirmation ministry at Bethany.

8 Somebody else mentioned God's provision and a Bible
9 verse came to someone, it was an old song that was in the
10 form of a Bible verse, what would it profit a man if he
11 gained the whole word but lost his soul?

12 We were writing all this down. We were going, this
13 is amazing.

14 One of the concluding ones was planted, protected,
15 and productive.

16 Somebody had a notion of a brother who was in on a
17 rescue plan, they were in a life of drugs and alcohol.

18 So Joshua 3:4, wow, it's amazing. So there's kind
19 of triangle thing that happens, revelation, interpretation,
20 and application.

21 And so we brought this stuff back and I'm really
22 praying on this stuff for about six months now.

23 And I think it was the second week of February,
24 maybe third week, a package shows up in the mail, it's the
25 Avalanche Ranch Bible school stuff.

1 I opened it up and discovered the overall theme of
2 it is Joshua. What are the odds?

3 I'm looking at it, we have Joshua 2, Rahab protects
4 the Israelites.

5 Joshua 3 and 4, the Israelites cross the Jordan
6 River.

7 Joshua 6, the walls of Jericho come down.

8 Joshua 1, what we are doing today.

9 And then there are two other texts, 2 Kings and a
10 text from Numbers that we're going to be looking at together.

11 I'm like that's an odd coincidence, and I get to
12 thinking, maybe Barb's vision of Joshua 3:4, maybe it was
13 more than one verse, 3:4, so I start reading the 3rd and 4th
14 chapters of Joshua.

15 You need to do that. It's about going across the
16 river into a new future, a way the people have never been
17 before. We'll look at that in a couple of weeks.

18 And so I didn't want to limit what God was saying
19 with one little verse, maybe it's several chapters, but it is
20 definitely a new way.

21 So we got to praying on this and in those two
22 chapters, 3 and 4, it really talks about men stepping up and
23 leading.

24 It says when you go across this river, you need to
25 choose twelve men who are going to put twelve stones and then

1 in future generations when the kids say how did we get here,
2 the dads are supposed to tell the story.

3 It's very specific. They are not going, what is God
4 trying to tell us about men?

5 What is God trying to tell us about Bible school?

6 Maybe he wants us to have it as a family event,
7 Bible school.

8 I think so. That's why we're doing it. Your
9 invitation is to be part of it.

10 It's interesting, the Bible school team, the first
11 week I shared this with them, they would go, "My husband,
12 he's not a leader."

13 I said, "What do you expect him to do? Get up and
14 preach? All he has to do is take part. Participate."

15 God is not going to call you to do something you're
16 not qualified to do.

17 He doesn't call the qualified; he qualifies the
18 called.

19 And maybe God is calling all of us to come together
20 as God's family and learn the stories together.

21 Because what we've done in the past is we always did
22 Bible school Monday through Friday and on Saturday we died.

23 We were so shot, and it was all women that did it,
24 except for me, and Gary Burmeister, bless him, and some kids.
25 There's no dads. There's no grandpas.

1 It was Monday through Friday, 9:00 to 12:00, and
2 then 1:00 to 4:00, whatever it was, but it was mostly moms.

3 Now, nothing wrong with moms. I love moms. I've
4 got one.

5 I love wives. I've got one.

6 I love women. So does God.

7 But what about the men? When are we going to place
8 the scriptures back into the hands of men, not in a
9 threatening way, but to have them help us get across the
10 river?

11 That's what we are going to be doing together. I
12 think it's awesome and I think it's purely a gift from God.

13 So how are we going to do it? We need to study a
14 little bit.

15 Here is the way we have to understand it. Again,
16 look at Joshua 1.

17 Moses is dead, here's his boots and Boot Hill, he's
18 now history, he's laying ten toes down, or however they
19 buried them in those days.

20 But we need to understand the significance of this,
21 so go back one chapter to Deuteronomy 34.

22 We need to see where the story has been to
23 understand where it is and where God is leading us.

24 So in Deuteronomy 34 what we learn in this is that
25 here is the story of Moses dying.

1 And I had a little map, it didn't look very good, it
2 was horribly drawn, but you have the Sea of Galilee and you
3 have the Jordan River and then you have the Dead Sea.

4 The Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River, and the Dead
5 Sea.

6 At the end of Moses' life God called him to go Mount
7 Nebo, and on Mount Nebo Moses is going to die, but he's going
8 to look across to the west and he's going to see the promised
9 land across the Jordan River.

10 And that's what we read then in those last chapters
11 of Deuteronomy.

12 And what he says to him in Deuteronomy 34 then, if
13 you notice there in Verse 4.

14 "The Lord said to him, this is the land that I swore
15 to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

16 "I will give it to your descendants. I have let you
17 see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there."

18 I was always challenged by that. I thought, you
19 know, God, you are such a killjoy.

20 Moses has been doing this for 120 years. How come
21 the poor old duffer doesn't get to go into the promised land?

22 That's kind of cruel, isn't it? It's kind of like
23 God to have a carrot out in front of his greatest leader at
24 this point in history and say you can see it, but you can't
25 touch it.

1 So I did a little reading. We were just on
2 vacation. One of best parts of being on vacation for me is I
3 get up early and try to catch a fish at about 6:00.

4 Then I come back and I drink coffee and I sit on the
5 porch of this cottage that Wenda and I can go to.

6 And she gets up at about 9:00, 9:30, and our son
7 Adrian was with us as well, he gets up about 9:00, 9:30, they
8 go for a swim.

9 I've got three hours of undivided time with God.
10 It's awesome.

11 I was reading all through Genesis, Exodus,
12 Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and I was thinking, what is
13 the deal with God being so cruel?

14 What happens is we just need to understand the
15 context of this, because just a few chapters before that, in
16 the Book of Numbers, that's the book right before, Chapter
17 20, Verses 9, 10, 11 and 12.

18 I've got 12 up here for you to see on the screen,
19 "Because you did not trust in me to show my holiness before
20 the eyes of the Israelites, therefore you shall not bring
21 this assembly into the land that I've given you."

22 If you are like me, you will say Moses, when was he
23 untrustworthy? What do you mean, didn't trust? Where does
24 that come from?

25 We need to read more deeply into the scriptures and

1 what we see in Numbers 20, the first few verses of that,
2 Verses 1 through 11, we won't read all of them, but what we
3 see down in Verses 9, 10, and 11 in Numbers 20:

4 "So Moses took the staff from before the Lord, as he
5 had commanded him.

6 "Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together
7 before the rock and he said to them, "Listen, you rebels,
8 shall we bring water for you out of this rock?"

9 "Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock
10 twice with his staff."

11 You see the deal is, God has just told him what to
12 do in Verse 8, take the staff and assemble the congregation,
13 you and your brother Aaron, and command the rock to bring
14 forth water.

15 Very, very specific plan. Take them out there and
16 get them out there and tell the rock to produce water.

17 But you see what Moses does is he embellishes the
18 story a bit and he takes his staff and he whacks the rock
19 with it twice.

20 God specifically told him, you just tell it to do it
21 and it will do it, but, you see, Moses took his stick and he
22 whacked it twice.

23 So now we need to think what is the deal on that?
24 Here is the deal on that.

25 God had been working with Moses since he was a very

1 young man to give him control of his temper.

2 When he killed the Egyptian, who was killing the
3 Israelite slave, and buried the evidence, that was the first
4 sign that Moses had a temper problem.

5 There were different times then as a leader that
6 God's people would challenge Moses and he would get
7 frustrated, and we all do, but God is constantly working with
8 him through the wilderness of you need to work on that temper
9 thing, Moses.

10 And finally they get to Meribah, that's where this
11 is taking place, and he said you tell that rock to produce
12 its water, and you can almost see Moses, he has this dark
13 side that comes out and he whacks the rock, and now Moses has
14 to learn accountability.

15 So what God does is he says you can't go in, you can
16 just see it.

17 And as I put myself in Moses' boots, at that
18 particular point in time part of me would say that's
19 horrible, that's cruel, he deserves it.

20 He has carried them this far, he has led them this
21 far, why can't he take them into the promised land?

22 But Moses doesn't complain once. What he does in
23 Deuteronomy 33 and 34 is he accepts that boundary that God
24 has given him and he blesses the people of Israel.

25 Not one word of murmuring, complaining or whining or

1 anything else.

2 You see, that's the greatness of a leader. It's not
3 about the leader; it's about God.

4 And he doesn't insist, well, you know, I've been a
5 member of this congregation for forty years in the
6 wilderness, I need to go across.

7 No, that's not what he does. He goes, you're right,
8 I have a problem with rage. I'll take my discipline.

9 It doesn't mean God doesn't love me. In fact, I
10 know he loves me, so I will just hand it off to the next guy,
11 and that's great leadership.

12 He hands it over to Joshua. Joshua was going to
13 take them across, so that is where we are going with all of
14 this.

15 Moses responds to the discipline with grace and
16 dignity.

17 And then what happens, you see, he takes his
18 medicine showing great courage and restraint.

19 He's teaching him accountability. He doesn't pout.
20 He blesses God and Joshua.

21 This is reminiscent, again, as I said, back at
22 Exodus 2, this is where he kills the slave, thou shalt not
23 kill, he got away with it, doesn't matter, there's
24 accountability.

25 So that's all unfolding and taking place, but you

1 see Joshua would learn then to share the triumph of the
2 kingdom by accepting the covenant which God offers.

3 You see, he has big boots to fill and now Joshua is
4 going to take over. That's what we see in Joshua 1.

5 So let's keep looking at Joshua's story. We got up
6 through 3.

7 Verse 4, "From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far
8 as the great river," he's pointing to them, take a look,
9 you're going across the river, this is all that is over
10 there, this is the promised land, all the way to the great
11 sea, which is the Mediterranean Sea, the incredibly fertile
12 crescent of land that is fought over to this very day, this
13 is what he's teaching Joshua.

14 "From wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great
15 river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to
16 the great sea in the west shall be your territory.

17 "No one shall be able to stand against you all the
18 days of your life.

19 "As I was with Moses, so I'll be with you. I will
20 not fail you or forsake you.

21 "Be strong and courageous, for you shall put this
22 people in possession of the land that I swore to their
23 ancestors to give them.

24 "Only be strong and very courageous, being careful
25 to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses

1 commanded you.

2 "Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the
3 left, so that you may be successful wherever you go.

4 "This book of the law shall not depart out of your
5 mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you
6 might be careful to act in accordance with all that is
7 written in it.

8 "For then you shall make your way prosperous and
9 then you shall be successful.

10 "I hereby command you, be strong and courageous, do
11 not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with
12 you wherever you go."

13 It's interesting, isn't it, he says it three
14 different times.

15 Be strong and courageous. Be strong and very
16 courageous.

17 There is that interesting little business in there
18 about on your left and on your right.

19 In other words, you are not allowed to be totally
20 left or right.

21 You have to kind of hang in the middle. Hang in the
22 middle, centered by God's word.

23 We see this paralleled in Exodus 14. We don't have
24 time to look at this, but we could.

25 This is the story of them going through the Red Sea

1 and there is a pillar of water on the left, and a pillar of
2 water on the right, and God says you guys go right down the
3 middle.

4 I'll protect you and provide for you, but don't get
5 too beyond yourself, too far left, too far right, stay
6 centered.

7 He says the same exact thing to Joshua because, you
8 see, he has gone through the Red Sea.

9 Now he's going to take him through the Jordan River,
10 a deliverance story every bit as dramatic as the Exodus one.
11 You'll see in a couple weeks in Joshua 3 and 4.

12 He says be strong and courageous. He says it three
13 times.

14 He'll say it again in the last verse of Chapter 1,
15 be strong and courageous.

16 How do we do that? Well, he tells us in Verse 7.
17 This is not just about suck it up, buck up, Bucko.

18 He tells how you're strong and courageous in
19 Verse 7.

20 "Only be strong and very courageous, being careful
21 to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses
22 commanded you.

23 "Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the
24 left, so that you may be successful wherever you go.

25 "This book of the law shall not depart out of your

1 mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you
2 might be careful to act in accordance with all that is
3 written in it."

4 In other words, the only way you're going to go into
5 the future is in God's word. That's where strength and
6 courage are found.

7 It's amazing when we talk about Bible study with
8 some people. They don't do it.

9 Everybody has got Bibles. I read the statistics not
10 too long ago.

11 I think the average American household has four
12 Bibles in it.

13 The average American household has four Bibles in it
14 and none of them get opened.

15 They sit on a shelf, or they sit on a coffee table
16 and they are a conversation piece, but they aren't opened and
17 consulted.

18 That's exactly what he says to Joshua. Here is how
19 you are going to do it.

20 Be strong and courageous, and there is an
21 implication in that.

22 I know it takes strength and courage to do your
23 daily devotion, and you don't just do it on vacation. Do it
24 every day.

25 Do not let this book gather dust. Stay firmly

1 grounded in the word and you will be strong and very
2 courageous.

3 But it isn't about you, Joshua. Remember the boots
4 you're trying to fill.

5 He wrote the first five books of the Bible. Now you
6 need to stay in it, and then take it with you into the
7 future.

8 And what does that say to us as men?

9 "Well, my husband is not a leader."

10 Maybe it's time. I needed to step up. I needed to
11 embrace that role more wholeheartedly in my own family. I
12 wonder if it's not the same thing for a lot of us.

13 But what we'll see in Joshua 3 and 4, that is really
14 what is going to be happening. They are going to go across
15 into a new future.

16 But the only way they are going to successfully do
17 that is by being in God's word.

18 They are going to have to get their feet wet. When
19 they step off the bank, that's the worst step, isn't it, that
20 first one.

21 I don't know if I can do this, or I failed so many
22 times.

23 Start again. Isaiah 43, Verses 1 and 2, you shall
24 pass through the waters and they will not overwhelm you,
25 through the rivers, for I love you.

1 This book that you are reading is not a hate story;
2 it's a love story.

3 I've called you by name. You are precious in my
4 sight and I love you.

5 I want you to go into the future grounded in my
6 word, God is saying to us, not just once a week, every day,
7 meditating on that word.

8 It's a rescue plan. A faith journey plan for
9 prosperity, not financially, spiritually.

10 My daughter gave me a CD a couple years ago and I
11 have not really listened to it very much, but I've been
12 playing it a lot on our deck lately and there is a song on it
13 from the band Counting Crows, and I just have fallen in love
14 with this song, "Mrs. Potter's Lullaby".

15
16 "Well I woke up in mid-afternoon
17 Cause that's when it all hurts the most
18 I dream I never know anyone at the party
19 And I'm always the host
20 If dreams are like movies
21 Then memories are films about ghosts
22 You can never escape
23 You can only move south down the coast
24 Well, I am an idiot walking a tightrope
25 Of fortune and fame

1 I am an acrobat swinging trapezes
2 Through circles of flame
3 If you've never stared off into the distance
4 Then your life is a shame
5 And though I'll never forget your face
6 Sometimes I can't remember my name."

7
8
9 I don't know about you, but there have been a lot of
10 times I've felt like an idiot, walking a tightrope of fortune
11 and fame.

12 And one of the ways I've felt that way in my life is
13 when it comes to doing devotions. I don't know enough.

14 Or feel like you're on a tightrope, or an acrobat
15 swinging trapezes through circles of flame.

16 Our lives just get out of control and we make
17 promise after promise to do it differently.

18 "If you have never stared off into the distance,
19 then your life is a shame, and though I'll never forget your
20 face, sometimes I can't remember my name."

21 God will always remember our names, when we are
22 idiots, when we're like acrobats doing the fake thing.

23 I don't know where that text finds you, but the
24 Bible specifically says your word is a light unto my path, a
25 lamp on my feet.

1 God will help us, but we need to take the steps.
2 There is a difference between faith and hope. Faith is
3 active trust.

4 If we think God is going to speak to us, then we
5 need to listen.

6 We need to invest in that time of getting our feet
7 wet in God's grace, and being firmly grounded in God's word.
8 It's a promise.

9 And I don't know who you are following, if you had a
10 Moses in your family that is dead now, but you are the man
11 now, you're Joshua, Moses is dead, but I want you to go into
12 a place you have not been before in your spiritual life, and
13 here is the way you're going to get there.

14 Through God's word, God's sacrament, God's table,
15 water, grace.

16 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my
17 path.

18 Here is the great thing about it. The only way out
19 is through.

20 The way forward is grounded, yes, and it's balanced
21 in God's word.

22 It's kind of like communion. It's blessed, it's
23 broken, and it's distributed.

24 That's us. We are blessed, we are broken, and we're
25 given to the world to feed a hungry world.