

Theme: “New leadership and a new land” – Joshua 3:7-17

“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you: I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and be of good courage.” Joshua 1:5b-6a

### Introduction

Mostly my knowledge of Joshua came from Sunday School and revolved around the battle of Jericho. As a kid I thought this was a pretty amazing story. Probably for many that is where our knowledge of Joshua begins and ends. Hence a little background to Joshua and indeed the book.

Earlier in his life Joshua was called Hoshea meaning ‘salvation’. But later Moses changes his name to Joshua, meaning ‘The Lord saves’ or ‘The Lord gives victory’. When this same name, in the Greek form was given to Mary’s firstborn, Jesus, it became the most loved of names. Joshua’s remarkable life was full of excitement, variety, success and honour. He was known for his deep trust of God and ‘as a man in whom is the spirit’ so says Numbers 27:18.

As a youth he lived through the bitter realities of life in Egypt in slavery. Then he witnessed the escape into the wilderness along with all those years wandering around. Now he is entrusted to lead the Israelites across the River Jordan into the promised land of Canaan.

Joshua proved to be not only a military strategist in the battles that followed but also a statesman in the way he governed the 12 tribes of Israel. But above all he was God’s chosen servant to bring Moses’ work to completion and establish Israel in the promised land.

In the Hebrew Bible the book of Joshua initiates a division called the Former Prophets, including also Judges, Samuel and Kings – all historical in content but written from a prophetic standpoint. They do more than merely record the nation’s development from Moses to the fall of Judah in 586 B.C. They prophetically interpret God’s covenant ways with Israel in history. In Joshua it was the Lord who won the victories and ‘gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers.’ (Joshua 21:43) This of course continues to be an issue to this day over the land still being fought over!!

Spare a thought for Joshua. What would it be like to follow Moses – not an easy task!! Yet Joshua was promised by God that ‘as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not fail you or forsake you.’

Even with this assurance it would have been too hard a task for most. Yet Joshua became a most adequate successor and successful leader of the nation.

The week before last I was at a National Ministers' Conference in Adelaide and one of the discussions was on transitions in ministry.

Our presenter, the Rev Jenny Tymms, made the point that there needs to be endings, in-between-time, then new beginnings as you end one area of ministry, migrate to a new place, and take up the challenges of a new placement leaving the past behind. This of course can be translated into many situations and relationships. Looking at Joshua, he had the opportunity to cross the Jordan and make a fresh start with the people of God, the Israelites, on the other side leaving Moses dead and buried in Moab. This is the setting of the reading today from Joshua 3:7-17. Here Joshua begins a new era and steps out beyond the shadow of Moses to forge new beginnings.

### Reflection on the Reading

If you visit Israel these days and go to see the Jordan River you may well wonder what all the fuss was about in crossing this creek!! For many, seeing the Jordan today is a real let-down. A huge amount of water is now drawn off for Israel's extensive irrigation schemes, leaving the Jordan not much more than a third rate stream for much of the year. At its best the River Jordan was never a large river. It is only a minor stream compared with the other famous Biblical region rivers such as the Tigris and Euphrates and the magnificent Nile.

Nevertheless, when the snows of Mt Hermon melted, the old Jordan became an awesome, raging, impassable torrent. In the spring time it regularly overflowed its banks, flooding into parts of the surrounding valley. Joshua and the Israelites were there in the flood season and somehow there is a repeat, in a smaller way, of the miracle of the crossing of the Red or Reedy Sea.

What happened we don't really know but there is a true story from the first World War that may shed some light on this miracle without detracting from it.

The story goes like this. A British officer leading his troops in that same Jordan region, without the support of engineers, wondered how he was ever going to get his troops and all they had across the raging stream. An Arab guide told him to draw near the banks, stay under cover and be patient. After a few frustrating days, the river simply stopped flowing for a while and everyone crossed with ease. The British officer was quite puzzled by this and asked how did this happen. Apparently in early spring, at the height of the raging torrent, tall cliffs are undermined further upstream and a mighty landslide occurs that temporarily blocks the flow until it is channelled through again. The Arab guide knew of this and simply said they had to be patient and wait, not knowing when it would occur. Does this lessen the miracle for Joshua? I don't think so! The Lord had

his man of faith, Joshua, there with his followers at the right time. The God of Joshua knew the right time. As the priests carried the ark into the fringes of the flood waters, the river stopped flowing. It is a miracle worth celebrating.

### Food for thought

Possibly the pertinent question for us today is this: How likely is God to work miracles today? My answer is that by finding people, who like Joshua are adequate for the task, and placing them at the right place at the right time to fulfil God's purposes still occurs. For me this can be and has been quite miraculous. In a sense we can take to heart the words given to Joshua, prior to the crossing of the Jordan, that gives strength and encouragement to him.

“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and be of good courage”.

Where there is trust and humility we can be part of miracles.

As I wrote this I was reminded of one dramatic occasion where I went to visit some-one with mental health issues who also had a drug addiction. As I approached his house there was obviously a major problem. Armed police were surrounding his unit. I walked up to the Senior Sergeant who motioned me back. When I didn't move he physically moved me back which led initially to a heated discussion but eventually he realised that I knew the young man in the unit. After a further ten minutes I was given permission to try to talk to the person barricaded within the unit. It was only a few minutes later that the young man came out, dropped his weapon and with me walked to the waiting 'paddy wagon'. I had known this young person for years and he was fine with me. I accompanied him initially to the police station and then to hospital. Somehow God had put me in the right place at the right time. I shudder to think what may have happened otherwise. God's timing, a miracle, call it what you like!

I believe God still uses faithful people like you and me to work miracles today. Simplistic –Yes, but effective also.

When we trust God enough to be humbly obedient amazing things happen. The eyes of Joshua could see the river overflowing its banks, his ears could hear the roar of the torrent. But Joshua, the successor of Moses trusted God more than he trusted himself and so the salvation miracle took place.

Praise be to God. Amen!