

Today's lesson continues the story of Israel's crossing of the Jordan and the events following it. In this lesson symbols continue to play an important role. Last week the key symbol was the Ark of the Covenant. This week the key symbols are memorial stones. One of the things that makes the Jordan crossing different from the Red Sea crossing is how the presence of symbols was to serve as a teaching point for future generations. The stones are to be reminders not so much for the current generation that experiences the miracle but an object lesson to future generations of what God had done for Israel. Key to this story is what persons are to say when their children ask them what do these stones mean? What in essence is being asked is the meaning of faith and why does it matter? Every generation is called to give meaning to others about their faith, its beliefs and practices. Without such meaning the faith is in danger of being lost and its values no longer practiced in the community. Faith often finds that meaning for others through the stories and symbols shared with others.

Principal One: The entire community is represented in creating the witness of God's grace in the crossing of the Jordan. Joshua is instructed to select a person from each tribe and have them to take a stone from the middle of the Jordan, from the place the priests' feet stood and lay them down where they camped the first night after the crossing. The value of the entire community being represented in the creation of this symbolic act said that no one should be excluded from knowing what God had done for Israel. In like manner future generations are to work together in creating an abiding witness of God's activity among the people. Also note that each man had to gather a stone from the middle of the Jordan. No one could get two stones thereby making it unnecessary for the work of others but each man is required to gather a stone for his tribe. An entire tribe's witness is based upon each man doing what Joshua commands of them. Are there some witnesses that are being lost in the church today because persons no longer fulfill their responsibilities?

Principal Two: The entire community is responsible for teaching the coming generation. A critical part to any community's survival is that of teaching its values to the next generation. When your children ask what do those stones mean to you? The response is to be truthful and personal. There is to be some ownership in what is being said and that ownership should reflect in values that others want to see instilled in their children. This teaching role is not just Joshua's role or the role of the leaders but the role of the entire community of faith. That is why it is important to know what one believes about the faith and why. We should always be ready to provide a response to those who ask us about the meaning of our faith.

Much of the instruction to Israel through Moses and Joshua centers on how to teach the coming generation about faith in God. Today we bemoan how bad things are especially among the young. But does much of that fault lie at our door for failing to teach them the faith that was passed on to us? We must seek to find a way to engage in a vital teaching ministry that focuses on the faith and not fun. A great disservice is provided our young if we lead them to believe all in life is fun. What is needed most in life is faith to handle all that life brings our way without losing hope.

Principal Three: The entire community celebrated the victory in the crossing of the Jordan. The credit for this miraculous crossing is not given to Joshua nor the priest but to God. The celebration is reason to reestablish commitment to God in the Promised Land. This reestablished commitment comes in the form of the ritual of circumcision which itself is another symbol showing Israel's faith in God. The celebration also establishes ways in which to tell the story of the miracle through songs, stories and acts. The celebration is an important feature in community recognition of just how great the thing is that God has done. We should never take God's greatness nor his goodness for granted but should celebrate them as a way of affirming our acknowledgment that the blessing came from above.

Going Deeper

How do you think the 12 persons Joshua ordered back into the Jordan to collect a stone from the middle of the Jordan felt?

What did the memorial stones do for Israel?

What did the memorial stones do for the nation?

How difficult was it for the priest to remain in the Jordan so long?

- A. Very difficult
- B. Somewhat difficult
- C. Not difficult at all
- D. Other

How difficult would it have been for you to stand in the Jordan waiting to be told when you can come out even when you have seen all the people pass by?

How have you tried to answer questions about your faith when asked why do you do _____?

What rituals do you use at home to communicate lessons of faith?