

Joshua 1:1-9 “Transitions and Transformations”

The text Barbara read is from the Old Testament, long before Jesus was born. The People of Israel had been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years after they fled from Egypt where they'd been slaves for about as long as the United States has been a nation. You might be familiar with the story of Moses and how he helped the Hebrew people flee from Pharaoh's army and how God helped the people escape by parting the Red Sea. The Hebrews wandered in the wilderness, they learned to trust God, they received the Law of Moses, and they came up with ways to live into those laws so that they could understand what it meant to be God's people. All the while, they were told that their journey would end and that they would be able enter into the Promise Land. Finally, after 40 years of a long, hard journey, the People of Israel stood on the banks of the Jordan River ready to cross over into the Promise Land. That's when and where our scripture for this morning takes place.

Moses had died not long before this, and so now his second-in-command, Joshua was in charge. God's people had been wandering for almost two generations. Since the time they left Egypt, a lot of them had died, but many others had been born which meant a lot of those folks on the banks of the Jordan River had no memory of being slaves in Egypt. To complicate matters, they received some disturbing intel from the spies who scouted ahead to see what was waiting for them on the other side of the Jordan River. Things didn't look good on the other side of that river. The spies reported that the land was occupied by giants. The best case scenario was that they'd likely face resistance. Worst case scenario is that they'd encounter extreme hostility. They were scared. But the message that God passed on to Moses and that Moses passed on to Joshua and Joshua passed on to the Hebrew people gathered at the Jordan River was – *“Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”*

The last part of that sentence is the key to maintaining the strength and courage they need to achieve their objective. “The Lord your God is

with you wherever you go.” Alright, but how do we know this? Well, look what the Lord has done to get you where you are *now*! Okay, that’s fine and dandy for the older folks who were eye witnesses to the Exodus! But there were plenty of folks in that crowd who were too young to remember or who hadn’t even been born yet. All they knew was the wilderness.

One of the great things about the Jewish faith and tradition is the importance of remembering and passing that collective memory on to future generations. Sure, you may not have been alive during the escape from Egypt, but that event is still a part of your story. And you need to be familiar with that story if you’re going to continue living as God’s people. And part of the way we remember is by telling and re-telling our story. That’s what we do here in church. We use scripture, songs, rituals and whatever we can to tell the story of what it means to be God’s people and in our case what it means to follow Jesus. So this morning, in honor of our graduates who are standing on the banks of their own Jordan River waiting to cross over into unfamiliar territory, Mary and I are going to share some things we’d like you to remember. Sure, this message is directed towards our graduates, but this message contains important principles for us *all* to remember because part of what it means to be a church family is to remind each other. So, in antiphonal fashion (fancy word for "tag-team") Mary and I have a few things we'd like to share with both Cameron *and* the rest of you ...

[MARY] 1.) Hanging on the wall above our bed, Jesse and I both have plaques with words of advice that reflect our core values and have inspired our actions. Mine reads, "Keep Calm and Carry On." Jesse's says, "The most important thing in life is to always be yourself...unless you can be Batman. If you can be Batman, then always be Batman." While humorous, this is exactly the kind of life we want to live and pass on to our children. Let us explain...

When we decided to start a family, we were given some very good advice from a ministerial colleague, Dr. Gina Rhea. She said to us,

"Children are not our possessions or are playthings. They are human souls who we get to travel with for a time. **They have their own free will. They will not always please you.** Your job, as a parent isn't to try and mold your children into carbon copies of yourselves. Your job is to help them find their spiritual center and their voice so that they can speak their truth."

[JESSE] 2.) This one is directed more toward you, Cameron, but it applies to others too. I can't imagine it was always easy being a PK2. By virtue of your birth, you were loaded down with expectations and assumptions that didn't always resonate with your personality or our family. Learning to navigate that was part of your upbringing. You inherited a Forty-foot Tall Purple Gorilla that stands behind you everywhere you go. That Purple Gorilla has an orange tee-shirt with green letters that say, "Preachers Kid." At other times, the shirt has, "Elder In Training" or "Teacher" or "Coach" or "Steward" or "Deacon," or "Regional Youth Council Person" written on it. That Gorilla is the blessing and the burden of our vocational title. Learning how to navigate with a 40 Foot Purple Gorilla behind you will always be a part of your journey whether you like it or not. However, you will find that there will be times in life when the gorilla comes in handy. Not because it's huge and can smash anything into the ground. It comes in handy simply because it's present. Spiritual Authority is best wielded by example. This was the case for both Moses and Joshua and it was passed on down to the leaders who followed them. As much as you'd like to hide this gorilla, as much as you'd like to put it in a cage, lock it up and throw away the key, it's always going to be there. And this applies to anyone in leadership! Elders, deacons, stewards, board members, teachers ... whatever your role might be in the church. How you wield your God-given spiritual authority is key to our church's mission and witness in the world.

[MARY] 3.) Which brings us to our next point. And this is the point that I brings us back to that foundational principle of both the Jewish and Christian faiths: *Remember*. Remember what is important. Remember

who you are. Remember where you came from. Remember to whom you belong. Remember your core values. Remember to listen twice as much as you speak. Cameron, this is what will sustain you should you have to participate in acts of war. This is what will sustain you as you begin your journey into adulthood.

These were your formative years. These were the years that you found your voice, your truth and your goals in life. And son, this is only the beginning of your journey. You've got so many more lessons to learn and you'll have opportunities to pass those lessons on to future generations. We love you. We're so very proud of you.

[JESSE] 4.) One of the tools that the Hebrew people used to remember the God who brought them out of Egypt was by praying the "Shema" which is found in both the book of Deuteronomy and Numbers in the Old Testament. The more common version is in Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

Most people who practice Judaism have what's called a mezuzah attached to their doorposts. The simplest ones are like a small plaque with the Hebrew letter "shin" which is the first letter in the Shema Prayer. Others are little boxes that contain mini scrolls of the Shema or the Ten Commandments. The point is that every time you go home, you see the mezuzah and are reminded of God's commandments. The Kearns family does not have a mezuzah on any of our doorposts. The closest thing we have is a framed picture called "The Family Rules" hanging in our kitchen. Here's what's written on that picture --

Always be grateful. Keep your promises. Always do your best. Be dependable. Work hard, play harder. Be happy. Be kind. Say, "I love you." Be proud of yourself. Help others. Listen to your parents. Remember the golden rule. Mind your manners.

That's sort of the "Kearns Family Mezuzah." We keep it posted by the pantry because ... well ... we have three boys who go through food like nobody's business. Do we follow all of those rules 24 hours a day every day of the week? Please. But they are there to remind us.

To the people of First Christian Church -- I want to thank you. Thank you for being there for our family. Thank you for being the part of the "village" that raised not only Cameron, but all our other graduates past and future. Your faithfulness is noted and appreciated. In the same way that the people of Israel faced their uncertain future by putting their trust in a God who was made known in so many ways, may we face our future with strength and courage ... confident that God goes with us wherever we go.