

Looking back over my life I cannot put my finger on the moment I gave my life to Christ. Church was always just a part of my life and I always remember having a relationship with God. However, I do remember several occasions over the course of my life that I wanted to be all in for God.

The first time I felt this way was when I was a teenager. We had just received a new pastor and I was sad the other pastor had left and went to another church. In my mind no one could replace him. But the first time I heard Rev. Rhonda VanDyke Colby preach was the first time I thought...hmm I think I want to do this with my life.

You see Rhonda was the most engaging preacher I had ever heard and when she preached it felt like she was talking directly to you. She had a warmth to her that I had never experienced before and each of her words invited you in. It was in this moment that I started thinking seriously about becoming a pastor.

What was the moment for you? What was the moment that you were all in for God?

For the Apostle Paul we know his moment was the Damascus Road experience where he was confronted by the risen Christ. After that moment he was all in for God. He encountered severe persecution and yet after that moment he chose to use every breath of his life all for the glory of God.

As we find ourselves in the last week of our “New Normal Sermon Series” we celebrate that the Apostle Paul helped many other people experience the moment where they were ready to surrender their lives to God.

In his book “Acts: Catching Up With the Spirit” Matthew Skinner shares what happens when we encounter God and accept Christ into our hearts. He says: “A commitment to Jesus affects everything about a person’s life and how a person understands [their] place in the world.”<sup>1</sup> Through our Scripture today we experience the lives of many people being changed by God.

In our Old Testament lesson from Joshua we see a moment where God’s people were reminded that God was leading them forward into a new life. The Israelites had been in the wilderness for forty years. During that time, they had experienced miracles, but they also spent a lot of time waiting and walking. As they drew nearer to the Promised Land I always wonder if they really thought if they were going to make it. While in the wilderness they experienced obstacle after obstacle.

They ran out of food, they ran out of water, they had problems trusting in God and their leaders.

The obstacle that the Israelites are facing in Joshua 3 is the flooded Jordan River. Clearly, they need to move forward, but how would that be possible? Joshua prepares the Israelites for this moment. In Joshua 3:5 he says: ‘Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.’ Joshua believed that God was going to continue to save the Israelites, but as they looked at the swollen Jordan River, I wonder if they really thought God would make a way for them.

But the next day something amazing did happen. At that time God had left the confines of the tabernacle and was traveling in the ark of the covenant. This was the sacred box that the Israelites carried with them everywhere they went. And on this day, it was when the feet of the priest carrying the ark hit the water that the miracle occurred.

Just as in Exodus with Moses and the Red Sea, the Jordan River parted, and the Israelites were able to cross over to their next location in route to the Promised Land. However, the crossing of the Jordan River may be even more impressive than the Red Sea.

Scripture tells us that the water “rose up in a single heap” (Joshua 3:16). Now that is impressive! I mean can you imagine seeing something like that? Just as the Israelites first crossed the Red Sea to escape slavery and oppression, they now cross the Jordan River, the same River that Jesus would be baptized in, so that they could reach the Promised Land.

I think this was one of those moments where everything changed for the Israelites. They had to know they were now so close to reaching the Promised Land and God would continue to save them through it all.

Now maybe we have not seen God do miracles with water like this in our lifetime, but I wonder if you have seen God make a way forward in your life when no way seemed possible.

This is what God does in our lives. God continues to save us and make a way forward for us. Even during this time of pandemic, we must believe that God will continue to save us and make a way forward for us. This encounter of God’s power by the Israelites reminds us that God is not confined to the corners of our sanctuary and God will continue to work in and through the church and its people.

Are we ready and open to have our lives completely changed by God?

Throughout the book of Acts many people encountered a moment that changed everything as they came to believe in Jesus Christ. In our Scripture for today from Acts 19, we hear of a group of people who gave up their livelihood and wealth to follow Christ.

During this time many people found themselves confused in the life of the early church. Mainly this was due to false healers. There were many who had claimed to heal people in the name of Jesus, but who were not in fact followers of Christ. These fake healers were trying to capitalize on the name of Christ and make money for themselves.

After three of these false healers were called out for their bogus powers many people turned to Christ. Even people who practiced magic for a living burnt everything associated with their profession so that they could mark a new way forward for themselves as they followed Christ.

This is a significant moment in the lives of the magicians. Skinner reminds us “how dangerous religious counterfeits really are” because they have the “tremendous capacity either to wreck or to restore.”<sup>ii</sup> In this moment they move away from a life of manipulation and taking advantage of other people and towards a life where they learn to care for their neighbors while embodying the love of God. In this moment, their lives are changed forever.

On March 15, 2020 our lives as we knew them changed forever. We could no longer worship together in our beloved sanctuaries. We had to stay home and away from loved ones and friends. We still are not back to normal.

But our Scripture for today from both Joshua and Acts remind us that the people of God are called to continue to trust in God. We are called to be able to push aside the spiritual counterfeits in our lives so that when we see Jesus Christ, we will be able to recognize Him.

Jesus is still doing work in the world and inviting us to participate through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is why it is so important for us to have communion today. It is another way God reminds us that God will save us and lead us forward with hope.

My hope for all of us today is that even during this season we have a positive “this changes everything moment.”

Maybe it will be an aha moment of learning something new about Scripture, or maybe it will be as you see someone else come to faith in Jesus Christ.

**The good news for our lives today is that God continues to call us into seasons of change so that we can move forward in our faith.**

Instead of being angry with God or untrusting, this is our opportunity to show our faith in God. We are people that still believe God can move mountains, we are people that believe that God can separate water to save God’s people. We are still people who believe that God will make a way for us.

So, during this season of uncertainty I want to issue you a challenge for this next week.

From this moment on I want you to give thanks to God for continuing to change you. Sure, change is not fun, but as disciples of Christ we are continuing to evolve in God’s love. The Israelites found themselves forever changed after their journey in the wilderness, the people in the early church found themselves changed and encouraged through people who sacrificed everything to follow Christ.

Change is how we evolve as Christians. It is in seasons of change that we find out who we are and who God is calling us to be. It is in seasons of change that we find creative ways to practice our faith.

May we continue to be open to the new directions that God may be calling us to go in these next couple of months. May we not be afraid of change, but embrace it remembering that the best news as John Wesley said is that “God is with us.” In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Endnotes**

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<sup>i</sup> Matthew Skinner. “Acts: Catching Up With the Spirit.” Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 2020. P. 118.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid. P. 130.

### **Additional Resource**

The New Interpreter’s Commentary of the Bible. Vol. II. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 2015.