

*The Second Sunday After Pentecost*

June 2, 2013

Amazing Grace Lutheran – Pastor Chip Wilke

Joshua 6:1-16, 20

*Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in." So Joshua son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant of the LORD and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it." And he ordered the army, "Advance! March around the city, with an armed guard going ahead of the ark of the LORD." When Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets before the LORD went forward, blowing their trumpets, and the ark of the LORD 's covenant followed them. The armed guard marched ahead of the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard followed the ark. All this time the trumpets were sounding. But Joshua had commanded the army, "Do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout. Then shout!" So he had the ark of the LORD carried around the city, circling it once. Then the army returned to camp and spent the night there. Joshua got up early the next morning and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets went forward, marching before the ark of the LORD and blowing the trumpets. The armed men went ahead of them and the rear guard followed the ark of the LORD, while the trumpets kept sounding. So on the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days. On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city! When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city. (NIV)*

I have a cure for sickness and disease. I have something that will even take care of those annoying allergies. Come to our house and go out into the back yard for there we have a kiddie pool. Wash in this pool three times and you will be healed from whatever ails you. Do you believe me? Will you trust my word? If so, I also have a way for you to make more money and get ahead in life. If you want the best job or to be the top student I want you to eat licorice for breakfast every morning (red is fine but black even better.) Soon you will get the promotion you've wanted or you will move to the head of your class. Do you believe me? Will you trust my word? Then I have one more wonderful thing for you. If you want to please God and have a special place reserved in heaven you should have your Pastor and his family over for a steak dinner at least once a year and take Pastor out for a round of golf. Do you believe me? Will you trust my word? Of course, these are just a bunch of silly suggestions. None of these things are actually true, but just things I made up to make a point.

But what if God said these things? Would you believe Him? Will you trust His Word? Or would you call God's Word ridiculous and get upset like the Assyrian commander Naaman did when he was told to wash seven times in the Jordan to be cleansed of his deadly leprosy? Would you laugh at the Lord's power and word like the giant named Goliath did as he saw this shepherd boy named David approaching him with a slingshot and a few smooth stones? Or would you trust the Lord even when His command sounds kind of silly? Would you believe God's Word even when it sounds ridiculous or unbelievable? If your dearest friend was sick and dying would you have the faith of the centurion to say to Jesus: ***"But just say the word, and my servant will be healed?"*** Would you obey like the Israelites in our lesson before us and follow Joshua when God's command seems rather, well – silly? I pray you learn to believe in God and His Word no matter what He says. I pray you have come to realize His Word is always true. My prayer for us this morning as we focus on the fall of Jericho is that we: **Trust in the Lord when the walls come crumbling down.**

Although this is perhaps the most well known chapter in the book of Joshua, a little Bible history review is always helpful. This is the second time a large number of Israelites were on the verge of entering the land God had promised to give them. Remember how because of their lack of trust in God their first attempt to enter Canaan under Moses ended in disaster. The Israelites sent 12 spies to search the land and the land was everything they were promised – a land flowing with milk and honey. Only there was one problem – the people there were much stronger than them. The spies said the Israelites looked like grasshoppers compared to the warriors and militaries there. Ten of the spies gave the report that there was no way they could take the land and the people rebelled against God and Moses. The Lord said to Moses, ***"How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?"*** Finally, the Lord sent the Israelites back to the desert to wander and said from that generation of men only Caleb and Joshua would be able to enter into the land of Canaan.

Now that time had come, but this time under the leadership of Joshua. Nothing had changed regarding the powerful enemies living in the land, including the strong city of Jericho. But what was the attitude of this new generation of Israelites? Would they trust in the Lord? As they approached Jericho the Lord, like He did at the Red Sea, parted the water of the Jordan River which was at flood stage so Joshua and the Israelites could walk across on dry ground. God was with them. We read: ***"Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men."*** Jericho had closed its' gates and got ready for war behind its' large walls. They had heard about what the Israelites did to the two Amorite kings, Og and Sihon, and how the Lord parted the water so Israel could walk across on dry ground. So they were at high alert and secured the city. Yet, the Lord promised Israel Jericho would be given into their hands. In fact, the Lord spoke as if it were already done.

Now the Lord gives Joshua the details of how He will hand this powerful city over to them. I'll just summarize for you all the details and you can tell me if you think this is a good military strategy. They are going to march around the city of Jericho. As they walked around these walls the armed guard would be leading followed by seven priests with trumpets in front of the ark of the covenant, and finally the people and the rear guard. For the first six days they marched around one time. The priests blew the trumpets but the people were commanded to be silent and not speak a word. After they marched they went back to camp. Could you

imagine doing this, not just once but for six straight days! Then on the seventh day this is the day on which hopefully they wore their good sandals for God commanded them to go around the city of Jericho 7 times. But on this day, after the seven times around these walls, when they heard the trumpet blast all the people were to give a loud shout. And this is how the walls of Jericho will come crumbling down. Really? Wouldn't you feel kind of silly doing this? Wouldn't you think your almighty God could come up with more spectacular plan than this?

Do you ever think those types of thoughts when it comes to God's ways? What are the walls you face in your lives? Perhaps we sometimes feel like the people trapped behind the walls of Jericho must have felt. Maybe you have problems that make it seem like the walls are coming crumbling down around you. If a certain sin keeps getting the best of us, if we face deteriorating health, if we have relationship issues which seem to be taking over our life, perhaps we too might start to question God's ways. We can find ourselves doubting His power. We might question if our prayers are making a difference. We might wonder if His Word is really enough!

This account of what the Lord does here at Jericho comes at a perfect time when we start to have such sinful thoughts. We realize once again God's command is not silly at all. God always has a plan and a purpose for what He says and does. The Lord was teaching the Israelites and us a very valuable lesson here at Jericho. The Lord was seeking one thing above all else. He wants our trust. He wanted the Israelites to put their faith in Him. This wasn't a military strategy. It was a test to strengthen their faith. The Lord has them do all these things so they are clear about one thing – that it is God and God alone who will defeat this fortified city of Jericho. It is God and God alone who will defeat their enemies. This city would be given into their hands as a gift – a complete gift from the Lord.

The seven days, priests, trumpets, and number of times they marched around the city on the seventh day are all symbolic that God was at work here. The number seven often symbolizes both the completeness of God's work and His holiness. That the ark of the covenant was in the center of the march reminded the people the Lord was there with them. The marching around each day is a reminder of the approaching judgment of God upon sin and unbelief. But above all these things were to teach the people to trust in the Lord. And as Joshua and the people listened to the Lord's command and did what He said you see the results. As the people shouted on the seventh day the mighty walls of Jericho came crumbling down just as the Lord promised. The Israelites went straight in and took the city. The writer of Hebrews by inspiration of the Holy Spirit understood what these things were all about as he writes: ***“By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people marched around them for seven days.” (11)***

So what about us? Do we trust in the Lord when the walls come crumbling down? For the Lord has given to us a far greater gift than the city of Jericho. The Lord has opened for us a home that far exceeds the land of Canaan flowing with milk and honey. The Lord has provided for us forgiveness, new life, and salvation. The Bible teaches us it is God and God alone who gives us all these things. The way God gives them to us is through His Son. For Jesus broke down the walls of sin and death and hell that surrounded us! By His perfect life and innocent death on the cross Jesus has destroyed all the dividing walls of hostility between God and us and between us and each other. Jesus, by defeating even our last enemy death, has brought us perfection and peace. And all these blessings are ours by faith. Now we are able to go straight in – to God's throne room with all our concerns and requests. We will be able to go straight in – to our heavenly home where we will live with God forever.

So today it is not me but the Lord who asks: “*Do you believe me? Will you trust my Word?*” God says do you believe me when I tell you I so love the world that I gave my Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life? Jesus asks once again this morning: “*Do you believe me? Do you trust my Word when I promise that here in this bread and wine I also give to you my body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins and to strengthen you for life’s way?*” These words are not silly at all, for this is the Word of the Lord – the Word which never fails – the Word that will endure forever – the Word the Holy Spirit has led you and me to believe. While the world may call it ridiculous, I pray we live by faith for as the Israelites found out it is a wonderful thing to trust in the Lord when the walls come crumbling down. Amen.