

26.9.21 am Rev. John Lachie Macleod

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Preacher: Reverend John Lachie Macleod

[0 : 0 0] Good morning and a warm welcome to the service today. It's good to have a number of visitors with us as well and you're especially welcome at the service. The service this morning is going to be conducted by the Reverend John Lachey MacLeod. I don't need to really introduce John Lachey. You knew him before you knew me as a Harris man and John Lachey is ministering in Glasgow but also has had this connection for many years with Romania and a team of us from Romania were out there. A team of us from Harris were out in Romania. Was it two, was it three years ago now? Two years ago. So we very much enjoyed being there and we look forward to hearing just how ministry has developed over the last while. At the end of this service there's a retiring offering as well for the work and John Lachey will share something of that and those who are able to please give to that at the end of the service. The Gaelic service is tonight, the monthly Gaelic service is tonight at six o'clock and that will be conducted by one of the elders, Mr. Farreker MacLeod in front of me here and then in the course of the week you've seen the intimations on the screen. We have

Ladies Fellowship, Little Fishers, Road to Recovery all at the usual times on Monday and Tuesday. I noticed that on Wednesday it says the prayer meeting is via Zoom at half past seven. It's still possible to meet on Zoom for those who want to to do that who are not able to come out yet but there'll be an in-person prayer meeting here in the church as there was last Wednesday so I would encourage those who are able to come out and to join together in prayer. Friday clubs for the young folks also on the screen there and you can be coming to that young folks if you're able and those who are not able because of age can be encouraged to pray for that. And the Connect Club are hoping to make shoeboxes for the Blythe Sweet Appeal so they'd appreciate any donations towards the boxes. There's leaflets in the porch which outline the required items and donations can be brought to the church or left in the box outside the door. And the final thing is just to say that the services next Sunday at 11 and 6 will both be taken by myself, God willing. So these I think are all the intimations and I'm now going to hand over to the Reverend John Lackey to lead the service. So thank you again John Lackey, we're praying on for you.

Thank you so much David for the welcome and when you said there's people here who know me before they knew you, I think there's people here who know me before I knew myself and it's a joy really to be with friends and brothers and sisters in Christ. I know there are lots of natural bonds but there's many spiritual bonds as well and these are the eternal ones for which we are thankful. It's great to be especially talking to the congregation knowing that you have such an interest in the Romania work, those of you who went out and the support we've received over the years has been so encouraging.

And we had hoped that there would be visitors from Romania with us but just with all the quarantine issues on their return it didn't really prove beneficial for them to be able to come. We did have one Romanian that we took from Glasgow, not a random Romanian, he is part of the work as well. Ovi who was a child at camp in Romania, became a leader at the camp and is now a trustee as well, lives in Erskine, having married Alison from Erskine. And I know a number of you met him, you met the family through the week and they were so blessed by the welcome they received and the hospitality they encountered. I want to thank you so much for making them feel so welcome here and they would have loved to be here but Ovi's preaching at Erskine Baptist Church this morning so they had to return. So thank you all again for your continued support and prayers but ultimately we are gathered with his glorious purpose of being together in the presence of God to give him the praise that he deserves and to worship him in mind and in heart and spirit and in truth. And we'll begin by singing together a great old hymn, I think you're singing off the screen if you are using a mission praise it's 201, guide me O thou great Jehovah pilgrim through this barren land, I am weak

but thou art mighty, hold me with thy powerful hand.

[4 : 55] guide me O thou great Jehovah pilgrim through this barren land, I am weak but thou art mighty, guide me with thy powerful hand.

bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me now and evermore. feed me now and evermore.
open now the crystal fountain whence the healing stream doth flow. Let the fiery, cloudy pillar lead me on my journey through.

strong deliver, strong deliver, strong deliver, be thou still my strength and shield. Be thou still my strength and shield.

when I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my ancient fears subside. Death of death and hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side.

[7 : 01] songs of praise, songs of praise, songs of praise, I will ever give to thee.

I will ever give to thee. well in our worship of God let's draw near to him as we pray together.
the psalmist encouraging the people of God in their public worship said, come let us sing for joy to the Lord. let us shout aloud to the Lord. Let us shout aloud to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.

for the Lord is the great God. eternal Father as we bow in your presence today.

we thank you that your word constantly reminds us of every reason we have to give praise and thanks to you. we recognize Lord that if we never lifted our eyes from our circumstances of or if we remain fixated on the things of this world, we might never see the reasons why God is to be praised or understand the mystery of the gift of being able to worship you and be renewed in our very created purpose whereby we come to call upon the living God, the one who has breathed life into our very being and has made us living souls by your own power and will.

[8 : 38] and the God who renews us into a restoration of being a child of God and a faithful worshipper once again, having been forlorn through our sinfulness and drifted in a godless mindlessness that causes us not to see the glories of God.

we are so often we confess Lord fixated with the passing wonders and the passing beauties of this earth. we do thank you for them, we recognize their value and worth and how the good things of this world can make the days of our experience enjoyable and pleasurable.

but we come to you today God because our souls crave the pleasures that last forevermore and the joy that is not dependent upon circumstances but the joy that is found through knowing the God whose very presence is blessed, whose very character is joyful because you are the eternally blessed God, the glorious Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the one true creator, the only redeemer, the one without beginning and without end, the one who knows the beginning and end of all things because within you, all things have their beginning and their end determined and decreed.

and so we come so thankful that we can draw near to you. we sang of the wonder of great Jehovah. we thank you that you are the God who has chosen to reveal yourself in time to your people in personal names whereby we are encouraged to encounter and know you personally.

and so we thank you that for centuries people on the face of this earth have known of Jehovah, known of a God who makes covenant promises, known of a God whose word is unbreakable, known of a God who is faithful in all the circumstances of life.

[10 : 25] and we thank you that you have made yourself clear to us, supremely clear in the other great name that is revealed in the person of your son Jesus Christ, that you are a God who comes to save your people from their sins.

we thank you Father today that we can have such assurance of the welcome that is found in your presence, for the welcome is not dependent on our goodness, but is solely dependent on the vastness of the mercy that you have demonstrated in sending Christ to die for our sins and to become sin for us, that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

O Father, we do marvel at all the wonders of these mysteries and all the wonders of your grace and truth, and we pray that as we worship you together today, we might be conscious of your nearness, that your truth might speak to us, that our minds would be informed, that our hearts would be warmed, and that our lives would be altered to follow after the Christ who came to lead us into glory. So Lord, with your pardoning presence, your great mercy and love, please be with us, bless us and hear us, in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I wanted to share with all the small boys and girls and big boys and girls about some of the things that happened in Romania this summer, and I wonder if I could get a picture up there, hopefully this is all going to work smoothly, and when the picture

comes up, next one please, that's just a Romanian flag, can any of the children have a guess which Bible character this is meant to be?

Any of the children guess? In the back row over there. No, but I can see why you'd think it's Goliath, because he's a very big man. You're not sure?

[12:18] No. Samson. Samson? No, you're all thinking about the big strong people in the Bible, which is good. You're on the right tracks. There's a very, some of the older boys and girls, if they think about what he's doing, you might recognize him.

Any more guesses? Nehemiah. Well done. That's who it is. There's a very, yeah, there's a terrible clue in the picture, and that the wall is knee high.

You're allowed to groan. But the reason I was sharing that picture of Nehemiah with you is because this year in Romania at the camp, Nehemiah was the Bible character that the boys and girls were studying.

And they were studying Nehemiah because in many ways in Romania at the camp in the same way as a lot of us are experiencing. This is a time of rebuilding. We had a whole year.

2020 was such a difficult year for the people in Romania. It was the first time for nearly 30 years that there'd be no camp in Varfaryllik. They lost contact with a lot of the groups, and things were very challenging indeed.

[13:30] But they were so thankful that this year they were able to gather again. Maybe we can see the next slide, where that was the very first opening ceremony in the summer of 2021.

They were able to have children again. They were able to gather people from the different parts of Arad and the regions that they have contact with. And they thought about what it means to rebuild our lives.

Because, boys and girls, I don't know how you felt throughout lockdown, but what the leaders in Romania were telling us, that a lot of the children who came to camp this year came with lots of worries. And they were very nervous about being back out in company.

Some of them in the schools in Romania, they had to wear their masks all the time. And they weren't allowed to play freely. There was a lot of restrictions. So a lot of them came to camp, and they'd had a very worrying and troubling year.

But if they move on with the pictures, or I'd better say this, just some information for all the big boys and girls as well, it meant that camp had to be done differently.

[14:34] They had a dedicated hygiene team. Just with all the cleaning that had to be done, they had a team that was dedicated to the kitchen and other parts. So as much as possible, there could be no cross-contamination.

And the first time the health visitors came to visit the camp, they actually made a list that was impossible. And they were really discouraged. And actually thought at one stage that they might have to cancel the rest of the camps in the series.

But thankfully, they did the absolute best they could. And actually, when the health inspectors came back, they were so impressed, they started picturing, taking pictures of all that they were doing at the camp and said that they were going to use it for the other organisations throughout Arad and Romania.

So we did take the safety very seriously. The next picture shows us, though, that the children still managed to have fun. Ask any of those who were there. The camp is in a beautiful spot.

It's in a very healthy spot. And the children were able to be outside and play. If we can see the next slide. They spent a lot of time. Everything they do is based around the story that they're following in the week.

[15:40] So Nehemiah had to depend on teams of people. And so the children did a lot of team-building games to teach them how they have to work together. And I think the next, just a close-up, and the next one again just shows them all enjoying the fresh air, which was a joy for many of them who had had such a difficult year.

And, as I said, the next two will just remind us of what's always at the core of the camp, studying God's word and sharing the story together. And they learned about Nehemiah.

I didn't dress like Nehemiah. I thought I'd just show you a cartoon. It would be a lot better for everybody today. But I want, just in this last picture, the next one that comes up, just to go through what happened.

One of the things we're so thankful to God for is that we were still able to hold 10 camps. Because each year the people come from different areas, and initially we thought they would have to cut the number of camps, and that would have meant making a decision about which groups and which areas couldn't get.

We thank the Lord that it'll come clear in a wee while how we managed to do that, but we're thankful that we were able to still do 10 camps, having had none in 2020.

[16 : 51] The next slide shows us that there was just slightly less numbers. Normally there would be 52 to 54 children at every camp. Just with the regulations, they were reduced.

The regulations really impacted us because the children sleep at the camp and in the dorms. So to make that safe, it was reduced, the maximum being 36. The number of helpers and leaders. In each camp, again, slightly down. Less children, less children, so it may be less, but because of the COVID, it certainly wasn't any less work. Just to give you an idea of the summer work, it takes 116 leaders, 36 kitchen helpers, 40 young helpers, and 21 cleaners to get the camps working all summer.

So there was a heavy workload for people to bear. But the next slide is something that we're very thankful for. Not one COVID case throughout the whole summer.

And we know how children, as much as we love you, you're good at sharing your diseases and sneezes and coughs with us. But we were very thankful that not one single COVID case.

[18 : 03] And in fact, Alexandra, who's the kind of doctor at the camp, was so thankful because she said, it's amazing. Not only was there no COVID, but this year there was no stomach upsets, there was no coughs, there was nothing compared to what we normally get.

You normally have a few sicknesses through the summer and we're so thankful to God that none of this happened. The final two slides, just to say the number of camp days was reduced. This is how we still managed to have 10 camps.

Rather than coming for seven days, the children came for five. But this was the most important thing of all, the last one, that God's grace didn't change. And amazingly, even though with all these reduced numbers, the number of children who wanted to follow Jesus and made a profession to follow Jesus was more or less the same as in 2019.

So we're really thankful to God for everyone who's prayed and been a part of this work. And we do pray that, like all of us, we can rebuild our lives, whatever disappointments we've had, knowing that God is faithful to us.

I'll say a word of prayer before we sing with the children before they leave. You are a faithful God. And we are thankful, Lord, that you show your faithfulness in many ways.

[19 : 18] And we thank you, Lord, for your faithfulness to the camp work at Varfareli this summer. And we're thankful, Lord, for the protection and peace that was experienced. All the other challenges that came in with Wilma and Vio, both being laid aside with illness at times, and having to depend at times and inexperienced leaders.

We're thankful, God, that you show that you are the strength of your people and that indeed your strength is a joy to be experienced. And so, Lord, we come to you and pray today, knowing that you are the Lord of all the earth, that you're the Lord in Haras as you are in Romania.

You're the Lord in the UK as you are in Africa. You're a God who's everywhere and a God who can be discovered anywhere as we call on your name. And we thank you, Lord, whether we're young or whether we're old, that you're a God who rebuilds, redeems and repairs.

And so we thank you, God, that you can restore people's lives. You can restore churches. You can restore areas. You can restore nations. And you're a God who takes joy in restoring your people. So we come to you today, God, and pray your blessing to be upon each one of us at whatever stage we're at in the building process you have for our life. We thank you again, Lord, for this congregation.

[20 : 38] We pray your blessing on David and his elders and all who are serving in ministry in various forms in this congregation and to this community. We're asking you, O God, to give them encouragement, to give them enrichment, to give them opportunity and to give them the faith to fulfill all that you have in your good and perfect will for them.

So bless us, Lord, as we wait upon you together. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's sing together. I have decided to follow Jesus.

Number 272. No turning back. I have decided to follow Jesus.

I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus.
No turning back. No turning back. The one behind me, the cross before me.
[21 : 56] The one behind me, the cross before me. The one behind me, the cross before me.
No turning back. No turning back. Don't go with me. I still will follow.
Don't go with me. I still will follow. Don't go with me. I still will follow.
No turning back. No turning back. Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
Will you decide now to follow Jesus? When you decide now to follow Jesus?
[22 : 54] No turning back. No turning back. No turning back.
No turning back. No turning back. No turning back. No turning back.
We're going to turn to reading God's Word from the Old Testament from the book of Joshua.
Joshua chapter 3. Joshua chapter 3, I'm sure we're familiar with the story where God has now brought his people to the threshold of crossing into the promised land.
And the chapter we read is the very final preparation for them to move and to take hold of what God has for them. I have a quotation above my desk that I read in a commentary and I wrote it out and pinned it above my desk because it frightens the life out of me.
The commentator said, I don't want to be part of a generation that God is waiting to pass away so that he can do something with the next one. It's a very solemn thought.
[24 : 24] And this generation had waited. They'd seen a generation pass away. But now God was going to bring them into all that he had promised. And it tells us that early in the morning, Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Sittim and went to the Jordan where they camped before crossing over.
After three days, the officers went throughout the camp giving orders to the people. Joshua told the people, Joshua told the people, So they took it up and went ahead of them.
Joshua said to the Israelites, Joshua said to the Israelites, come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God.
This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Gergesites, Amorites and Jebusites.
See the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. Now then choose 12 men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe.
[26 : 24] And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap.
So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest.
Yet as soon as the priests who carry the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing.
It piled up in a heap a great distance away at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarathun, while the water flowing down to the Sea of Arabah, that is the Dead Sea, was completely cut off.
So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.
[27 : 29] Amen. And we thank the Lord for his holy word. And now just before we turn to look at God's word together, we're going to sing in Gaelic. We're going to sing the first two verses of the 23rd Psalm, Psalm 23, the first two verses.
Sal connais-la les, todayona.
Asenia And I'll see you next time.
And I'll see you next time.
And I'll see you next time.
[29 : 35] And I'll see you next time.
And I'll see you next time.
And I'll see you next time.
And we're really worried about what we do next or where we go next.
I was finding funny the other night, driving through Stornoway, seeing people who were obviously trying to find somewhere on their sat-nav or on their phone. and because the place is so familiar to you, you think, well, how can anyone get lost here?

[32 : 26] But it's easy to get lost when you don't know where you are. And so often in life, we are ultimately in a position of lostness to the Lord directs us to where we need to be and where he wants us to be.

And so often, even for the people of God, there are times where the Lord is leading us through uncharted waters and uncharted territory. And we hear so much about what's happening in our own nation in terms of political and social, educational, moral issues.

And for many people who grew up in a fairly comfortable acceptance of Christian ideology, these are troubled times and uncharted waters for us.

But what we read in Joshua is tremendously encouraging for us because here were a people in a situation that they had never faced before. The previous generation had faced something very similar.

They had come through the Red Sea. But now they were going through another body of water.

They were going through another similar challenge. And they find themselves on the cusp of this new beginning, but facing their own personal challenges.

[33 : 34] How do we know what to do when we're not sure what we're meant to do or where we're meant to go? There were difficult times for Joshua, difficult times for the people of God.

And we know they were difficult because God spent so much time assuring him. When God constantly tells Joshua not to be afraid and not to be discouraged, we realize it's because Joshua was afraid and Joshua was discouraged.

There was so much going on that he was in fear of the future, in fear of his leadership, in fear of what would happen. And yet God comes to him, God speaks to him and God assures him.

And so what I want today is just to think about how every one of us, whatever we're at in life, maybe it's somebody who's even on the verge of becoming a Christian. And the thought of becoming a Christian can be daunting because it's the realization.

It's a new beginning. It's a new direction. It's a new journey. How will you get on? How will you get through? How will you make progress? How will you grow? How will you be able to leave the past behind?

[34 : 44] Will you have the strength to keep going? Well, the God of the Bible would say to you, look, I'm going to speak to you in such a way so that you know what to do and you'll know where to go even though you have never been this way before.

Even though it's new, even though it's challenging, you will know which way to go since you have never been this way before. There's such a wonderful certainty in that statement.

I came across a great phrase once upon a time, somebody writing about the times in which he lived and he called them times that try men's souls. It was written in a pamphlet called Crisis, written in 1776 with regards to the problems facing the colonies in America.

But just in case you get the wrong impression of my academia, I read it in a commentary that somebody was quoting. But he was quoting it because he was writing in December 2008 and talking about the times that he lived in where he'd never seen so many people troubled and he was quoting this pamphlet from Thomas Paine saying, these are the times that try men's souls.

And I was reading it in the middle of the pandemic and thinking, well, these are the times that try men's souls. In fact, I had to think, what was wrong in 2008? Somebody was so troubled.

[36 : 06] I think it was the financial crisis. I guess there's benefits to being broke. You don't have so many troubles as some at times. The times that try men's souls and women's souls and the times we've lived through have undoubtedly been times to try us and times to test us.

But the challenge is, where do we go beyond the trying? Where do we go beyond the testing? Will we be like this generation and actually make the progress into the future God has for us and the promise of God to his children?

The promise that he would lead them and that he would guide them. And in the times of intense difficulty, whether we want to go back to Joshua's day or many other biblical situations we could refer to when the people of God found themselves up against it or whether we can go into situations in church history, whether we can go to crisis in global economics or crisis in America or crisis in the pandemic, here's one thing that can anchor any troubled soul in the midst of troubles, that God is above and beyond the troubles, that God is greater than the troubles and God controls the times, even the times that try our souls.

It is such an assurance that the Lord, when he spoke to Joshua, never said, you know what, Joshua, you know, don't be afraid.

I've looked at your CV. You're quite a suitable candidate for this job, Joshua. I've saw the way that you were at the tent with Moses and you saw what he did and you've learned from him. You know what, Joshua, I think you've got it in you to make it.

[37 : 48] No, he said, Joshua, don't be afraid. I'm with you. I'm not asking you, even though undoubtedly Joshua benefited from all his apprenticeship and all his training, God's ultimate word of assurance in the time of challenge for Joshua was not, Joshua, you've got the skills to work this out.

He said, no, Joshua, I am with you. I'm with you. And for the church of Jesus Christ, that always has to be the glorious assurance that we hold on to, that the key to getting through the troubled times is not in the things we can see, but in the knowledge that the unseen God is the God over all the earth.

Isn't it interesting how that phrase was used twice in our reading? That as the people of God are being given the covenant, an arch of the covenant of God, to go into the promised land of God, to receive the promises of God, that God twice reminds them of this.

He is the Lord of all the earth. The Lord of all the earth. Because they knew that ahead of them, there were enemies. They knew that ahead of them, there were challenges and there were problems.

They knew that ahead of them were all these people groups that would be opposed to what they wanted to receive and inherit in the land. And sometimes the knowledge of an enemy can be intimidated and the knowledge of an enemy can be debilitating.

[39 : 17] And sometimes we think, maybe we're thinking about a Christian faith, oh no, I can't go to that situation or I can't share with that person. That person is subject to the authority, power, and glory, and majesty of the God who made and loved and saved you.

They might not acknowledge it. They might not like it. They might even despise it. They might turn their whole life against it. But God is a God of ultimate and eternal truth, even though our world doesn't embrace these concepts.

And the truth that the people of Israel had to lean on and rely on is that as we go forward and as we move on in life, not knowing exactly what's ahead of us, we move on trusting the God who does know exactly what's ahead of us, who does know exactly the way that we need to go, who does know exactly how we're going to overcome, who does know how we're going to get through.

How many a person has been in the place, I don't know I'm going to get through this, or I don't know how we're going to get through. And I hear church leaders in our area say that, I don't know how we're going to manage after all this.

But the fact is, we don't know. But what our faith encourages us and exhorts us to do is to trust in the God who does know, the God who is greater than the problems on the face of the earth, the God who is greater than pandemics, the God who is greater than enemy tribes, the God who is greater than thrones and greater than governments and greater than all the things that take place in the history of the world.

[40 : 57] I mentioned that Ovi was here with his wife and family and felt greatly blessed. He shared in some of the meetings we had up in Lewis and he made me feel very old because he said he was born in the year of the revolution in Romania.

It made me feel old because I was converted the year of the revolution in Romania. But it was such a powerful testimony. And for those of you who remember praying for Romania in the darkest days of communism, in the days when Bibles had to be smuggled into the city where Christians used to meet out.

We meet out in the camp now as a luxury and a blessing and a time of refreshing and enjoying.

Christians used to meet out in the woods for safety. They used to go out in secrecy.

In fact, some of the leaders we have are round about my age and slightly younger, some of them. They were children, Christian families growing up towards the end of the revolution.

They remember praying over their parents because their parents would be going out to Christian worship and they were never sure if their parents would come home. They remember the times of being in the forest, meeting missionaries from America and from Scotland and England, coming to share with them the gospel of Christ.

[42 : 15] And in that country today, there is unprecedented freedom to share the gospel. In fact, if you go to the city of Arad, they laughingly call it the New Jerusalem because there are so many

churches in the city of Arad.

In fact, the town hall in the city of Arad, which was once the kind of, the power room of the communist mayor in that town, opposing the church and all the rest of it, he rebuilt the town hall, the first new mayor after the revolution rebuilt the town hall and above the three pillars on the doors going into the town hall is written in Latin the way, the truth, the life.

Ceausescu never got to stand in his palace and preach to Romania the way that he had envisaged in Bucharest. You can visit it today, the place that he built for his own power. He's almost like a Nebuchadnezzar.

He built this massive, or he started building it. They killed him before he finished. And you can go and visit it. It's quite interesting. They take you on to the balcony and they tell you the story. He had this balcony built with a great big roadway all the way down and this was his vision, that he would stand there proclaiming his ways to the people of Romania. And hopefully, I think he envisaged a greater influence in the Soviet Union.

[43 : 33] Ceausescu's gone. Ceausescu's dead. And the church that he tried to oppress, crush and destroy is flourishing. In the very country, he thought he would deny its existence.

And I think in God's sense of humour, I found it quite funny that apparently the most famous thing ever to happen on the balcony that Ceausescu built was that Michael Jackson said, hello Budapest, and had to be corrected and reminded what city he was in.

Something built in the vanity and pride of sinful, godless man. And it's just a tourist attraction and a place of comedy and memory.

See, the tumultuous things of this earth are still under the power and authority of the God we serve. And that God hasn't deviated from his plan.

This is another wonderful thing we learn from this crossing into the Jordan. You will know which way to go though you have not gone this way before. We recognise why they would have their fears and why they would have their concerns.

[44 : 42] They were inexperienced. There wasn't a special school or a special class for learning how to cross impassable bodies of water. And we recognise that what happens here is a miracle.

It is one of the miracles that take place in the Bible and they are purposefully there and they are purposefully miraculous. One of the arguments you sometimes have with non-believers is that they don't believe the miracles of the Bible and they say well I can't help you there because it's a miracle. And if you don't believe the miracle you can try and find some scientific explanation and there will undoubtedly be scientific processes when God performs a miracle because he's the God who created everything that is scientific.

but in terms of accepting the truth that happened here there comes a place in a person's life where you recognise the miraculous and bow in awe and majesty at it or you stumble in disbelief and unbelief.

and we realise that for the people of Israel that they had that same challenge that even though they knew of a generation that had stood on the banks of the Red Sea and had witnessed a miracle that when it was their turn that they weren't suddenly expecting another miracle.

[45 : 58] They weren't like some of the schools of thought we see today that say you can just turn up and demand miracles almost when you want them. No they were standing there recognising the impossibility of their situation.

Joshua was recognising the hardness of the situation but one of the things this word tells us is God is moving his people on because God doesn't deviate from his plans.

God doesn't change his plans for us. He doesn't change his desires. He doesn't change his focus. He doesn't change his commitment.

You can easily summarise the story of the Bible somebody said by recognising it is God's plan to have a people living in his place in his power. From the beginning when he put humanity in the Garden of Eden to live in fellowship with him God's plan having a people who are living in a place that he has provided for them living under the glory of his power and his peace and in relationship with him and then you can fast forward to the end of the Bible and see that that is God's great purpose that there is going to be an eternal day where God will be with his people and his people will be with him in eternal unity in the blessedness of eternal fellowship and glory and an everlasting kingdom.

That is God's plan and he doesn't deviate from it. He calls Israel he calls the church. God calls people on the earth to live not we're not confined by geographic location nowadays but we are confined by spiritual location and spiritual obedience and spiritual boundaries and we live for God for the glory of God under his power under his rule experiencing his peace discipling one another discipling the nations because that is God's plan and when God brought the children of Israel to a place where he says you're going to go forward even though you don't know where to go you're going to go because this is my purpose for you.

[47 : 58] As I said in that quote before I read the Bible a generation had passed away and God had found another generation and this was their day this was their opportunity to go and to step into what God had.

They were blessed when others had missed out. They were blessed when others had been punished but the thing that didn't change is that God had a land that he was going to occupy with his people as a testimony to the earth of the reality of God.

God had his son come into the world to fulfill all that God intended through the witness of Israel to the nations salvation, redemption forgiveness and mercy to be found with the living God through his promises through his covenant.

Jesus fulfills it Jesus commissions us and so the church to this day still stands in the flow of God's truth, promises purpose and power that we go to declare to the world there is a living God who is offering salvation and eternal mercy and eternal life through Jesus Christ his son.

It's God's plan and he doesn't change. I will build my church with his promise his commission to his disciples go into all the world make disciples of all nations teaching them baptizing them and I will be with you.

[49 : 22] Jesus hasn't deviated that's one of the great things that has encouraged the folks in Romania when things did renew this year that they were able to see how God had kept doors open opportunities they thought might be lost God renewed.

Children still came and confessed their need of God. Children still came and committed their lives to the Lord and the work continued the discipleship goes on because God hasn't finished his business and he hasn't changed his plan he's not deviating from it.

I will give you as I promised Moses I am with you as I was with Moses. You see sometimes it's easy to go and read a book about some aspect of church history or something in the revival history of the past and think well that was great what God did then but it's hard then to accept at times for us that God would still want something now and do it with us.

I think that was part of Joshua's problem and as God said to him many of you know the beginning of the book very well how the writer emphasises the death of Moses and he keeps talking about the death of Moses because it's a reminder to Israel you know the great dynamic servant that you had is gone but here's the test for you was your hope in that human being or was your hope in the God that had led that human being do you believe that it was God who did everything through Moses or do you believe that it was Moses that did everything I think that's one of the mistakes we make God brings gifted people into our lives and we associate the things that God does through them as if it was something within their own power but Joshua he knew what Moses was and who Moses was and what a blessing it must have been to him to hear God keep saying to him but Joshua as I was with Moses so I am with you as I was with Moses so I am with you as I was with a previous generation of people so I am with you oh but we're not this and we're not that no we're not but God is we're not what other people were and yes we look back and there's some people we remember and we wish we could have more of what they had but the reality is if they had anything of worth it was from God and he's still here and he's still with his church and he's still with his people and he still has his purposes so we just have to do what the Israelites had to do in Joshua chapter 3 they had to focus on the task at hand

Nehemiah's famous quotation I cannot come down for I am doing a great work it's such a powerful one and one that church leaders often need to remind ourselves of because there's so many things that you get asked to be involved in so many things that the agendas of life and the agendas of the world want you to be involved in but Nehemiah recognised no I'm not going to go down for a political conference when I'm building the walls of Jerusalem when I'm up against the challenge to leaders to fulfil what God has sent me to do to rebuild this city to rebuild the walls to give glory back to our God and to see his hand move upon his people Joshua had to focus on the work that God had given him to do you'll find that in life the greatest distractions always come when there's

something the Lord wants us to do and I just want to focus on some of the things we see from the people of Israel what were the things that they focused well the obvious ones are things like the word of the Lord in chapter 1 we read of it in verses 7 and 8 be strong and very courageous be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you do not turn from it to the right or to the left that you may be successful wherever you go keep this book of the law always on your lips meditate on it day and night friends there's such a challenge for us today to keep the word of God central to keep the word of God and you say well of course that's what we do but I'm telling you there's been challenges and especially when the word of God is embarrassing our culture and challenging our culture when there are times when the word of God really exposes the sinfulness of our culture there is a temptation to ignore the word or to deviate from the word and the history of the church in many parts of America and the western world we see that people deviated from the word of God people lost a hunger for the preaching of the word

[54 : 21] I was in a church one time I should have asked if this is being recorded well they won't listen the people I'm thinking of won't listen to me anyway so I'm okay I was in a church one time I kind of jokingly say this that I was about to walk out till I remembered I was preaching I'd sat for I don't know how long we had a 25 minute slideshow on the picnic the church had had the day before and there was all other kinds of nonsense and then just as I did go to preach the man said to me now be careful and watch your time and I said 25 minutes of absolute nonsense and I'm being told to curtail the word of God I'm conscious actually David didn't give me a time but I'm not going to take liberties you will get out today the word of God people in my own church have told me some of the things that they put up with in the past and why they were one day looking for someone who would preach the word again because so much of what the church had gone into was displacing the preached word of God displacing the authority of the truth of God this is in evangelical churches this is in churches that if you asked anyone do you believe oh yes I believe the Bible

I believe the Bible is the word of God they would tell you that they believed everything but the way they lived the way they worshipped the priorities of their life were not the word of God they were more caught up with celebrity with drama with all kinds of things rather than having the word of God shape us direct us stick he says to the word of God I love what A.W. Tozer said in relation to worship and the word of God he said modern religion focuses upon filling churches with people the true gospel emphasizes filling people with God modern religion focuses on filling churches with people the true gospel emphasizes filling people with God and we do that by bringing the word of God so people are not dependent on us they are dependent on the law of God they're dependent on the truth they need to be conscious of the spirit's leading I'll come back to some of this in a moment but I very briefly want to point out when we're thinking how do we then go forward how do we then trust in God accepting his sovereign what are the parameters we work with as we move forward well we make sure that our life is being shaped and moved and directed by the word of God and we're conscious that we follow the Lord's leading and not the kind of democratic will of a people we follow the will of God and the word of God

I'm not against democracy I'm not talking politically I'm talking spiritually you can't have your life governed by people's feelings and votes when you're following Christ Christ has to lead us his spirit has to guide us I was laughing to myself the other day I love coming home because there's nowhere else I go in the world where people make so many comments on my weight apart from the weather I think it's the number two and I've had everything from oh man you're putting on the beef to oh goodness you're so thin so if I was to live my life with people's perceptions I would be one minute gorging one minute fuss get to know what God says about you not people's opinions get to know what his spirit is saying to you not just what's popular or what's the latest thing not what people are saying but what God is saying you must move he says when you see the ark and of course the ark is symbolic of his presence God is moving we follow his leading

Jesus lived like this you know we read the stories about Jesus and the way that he went from place to place and the way he went from person to person and the way he healed here and ministered there and all these wonderful things and we think you know how did he manage how did he know what to do well he told us how he knew what to do the son can do nothing by himself he can do only what he sees his father doing because whatever the father does the son also does Jesus was doing works and he encouraged his church to do the same to do the things that the father was already doing you know I've spent so many hours in my life in church committees people in crisis you know what are we going to do about this how are we going to get this how are we going to reach this

where are we going to do that I honestly believe if we took time to seek God we would see and I know that sounds so simplistic you know it's too easy I think it's actually hard because it means I have to still my soul I have to quieten every other voice

I have to shut out every distraction till I can see and hear and know what God is already doing so that I can share it as the great preacher Jonathan Edwards said the task of every generation is to discover in which direction the sovereign redeemer is moving then move in that direction friends when we look at how the people of God advanced in difficult times the principles are straightforward they believe the word of God they look to the spirit of God and they shared concern for each other you know it's a remarkable thing that there was a warning given to the tribes who already had their piece of ground on one side of the Jordan and so in one sense it was of no personal interest to them what happened on the other side but they were quick to learn that in God's kingdom it did matter that the kingdom is greater than our place in it the kingdom is greater than our corner of it and so they had to go and fight for each other you would sometimes think the Bible says that Christians should fight with each other but it actually says we fight for one another for the glory of God to encourage progress to move all of us on in our faith and in our following of Christ you know that great insight to the spiritual life of the church that Paul gives to the Ephesians

[60 : 37] Christ himself gave the apostles prophets evangelists the pastors and teachers to equip his people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up not so that individuals can have great and powerful ministries great and powerful influence no so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature atturing to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ three very simple principles that we see in the book of Joshua when they are going away that they do not know which way to go because they've never gone it before but they do know the word of God they do know the spirit and the leading of God and they do know their personal responsibility to engage with one another for the glory of God and finally they know that God is with them

I've said probably much of this already but I do think it's probably the great truth that we take from this this morning is the wonderful assurance of the presence of God with his children there is much that can be said about the wonder of the presence of God but we see it again throughout the scripture God wanted to be with his people in the garden then when God begins the redemptive story he comes and he fellowships with Abraham when God calls a people out of slavery what did he do after they had been built up as a people in Israel well first of all he calls Moses for a personal encounter then he calls them out and he leads them and he prepares for them and remember what the desire was when Moses went when Moses went to Pharaoh he says let my people go so that they go out into the wilderness and hold a festival unto me that they can come and have a celebration with their God and then he speaks from the mountains so that they have their law and they have the tabernacle and at the heart of the tabernacle is the room that reminds them of God's holiness and God's character as his presence leads them by fire and by crowd

God is with them and then we see it in the building of the temple when it's eventually built and they have all this glorious physical building but the real glory is this God comes in the power of the spirit and fills the temple his glory fills the temple and so they knew that God was with and that becomes the focal point of all their worship and all their joy and then we see in the New Testament that Jesus unsurprisingly continues this wonderful truth God is a God who is with his people God came and he was revealed in the name Emmanuel God is with and then as he leaves the church he gives them a promise I will be with you to the end so again going back to what we said God's plan has not changed and the promise that accompanies that plan has not changed as long as we are in tune with the plan of God for our lives the presence of God is promised to us

I will be with you even to the end of the age but then he did tell them to wait why did they have to wait because the spirit's coming because God will be with you and friends the future can be daunting the future can be frightening it can just be uncertain maybe it's just exhausting I know many of us feel that way with all that's happened we're just exhausted with it all but here's something to refresh the soul here's something to encourage us and to bless us of whatever's next whatever next step you and I need to take and we do need to take steps of faith somebody reminded me in one of the commentaries you know you have to get your feet wet following the Lord because the the priests did not see the miracle until they stepped into the job I don't know what God is asking you to step out to we had to step out in faith regarding things in Romania we get challenged to step out in faith in our own church and we get challenged to step out in faith in our

own life what does it mean for you and for me today to get our feet wet in faith to follow Christ and whatever fear that may bring into your mind what conquers the fear is the knowledge that God is with us let's pray

Lord to say that you are with us such a simple statement but in that simplicity we don't want to take anything for granted we don't want to be presumptuous but neither do we want to be ignorant and miss the enormity of the opportunity that is presented to every human soul in a gathering of worship that we can draw near to the living God because of your pledge because of your promise to know afresh your power to know afresh your peace Lord we could be standing on the shores of many a situation this morning in the gathering of minds and hearts that are in this place things related to work to business to studies to life decisions troubles in life troubles in our own minds troubles in relationships troubles oh God of the world the worries and fears that come to us

[66 : 48] Father help us to see that you've gone the way before us that what's unknown to us is perfectly known to you and help us to see clearly where it is you want us to step out maybe it's in terms of public profession maybe it's in terms of witness maybe it's in terms of service maybe it's in terms of renewed private devotion of stilling our hearts from the noise of the world that we might again know the still small voice of our God Lord you go before us help us to faithfully follow for the glory of your name Amen Our closing hymn is number 760 when we walk with the Lord in the light of his word what a glory he sheds on our way when we walk with the Lord in the light of his word what a glory he sheds on our way while we do his goodwill he abides with us still and with all who will trust and obey trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey not a shadow can rise not a cloud in the skies but his smile quickly quickly drives it away not a doubt nor a fear not a sign nor a tear can abide while we trust and obey trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey not a burden we pay not a sorrow we share but our toil he doth richly repay not a grief nor a loss not a crown nor a cross but it's blessed if we trust and obey trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey but we never can prove good lives of his love until all on the altar we lay for the favour he shows and the joy he bestows of a friend who will trust and obey trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey then in fellowship

sweet we will sit at his feet but we'll walk by his side in the way what he says we will do what he says we will go let it be it only trust and obey trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey and may the eternal and glorious God grant to each and every one of us the wonderful grace and mercy that will enable us to trust the Lord who knows all things and to obey the voice which speaks eternally to us and may the blessing of God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit descend and remain with you this day and forevermore that you may ever live and die to his eternal glory

Amen