

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

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All Saints Sunday

Joshua 3:7-17

⁷The LORD said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. ⁸You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, 'When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'" ⁹Joshua then said to the Israelites, "Draw near and hear the words of the LORD your God." ¹⁰Joshua said, "By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: ¹¹the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan. ¹²So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹³When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off; they shall stand in a single heap."

¹⁴When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people. ¹⁵Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, ¹⁶the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.

I John 3:1-3

¹See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. ³And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

"On Your Shoulder"

Do you know that old saying, “a chip on your shoulder.” It is an old saying, “he has a chip on his shoulder,” or “she walks around with a real chip on her shoulder.” The connotation is that the person has some anger issues because of something that happened in the past. Whatever that was that happened in their past has lasting effect into the future and into that person’s present reality.

“A chip on the shoulder”—this old English idiom comes from the time when a man would put a chip of wood on his should and challenge his opponent to knock the chip off. This was the honorable way in order to start a fight between two men.

So you may have heard your parent or old-timer say to you, “I’ll knock that chip off your shoulder.” They probably did not mean that they wanted to literally hit you; they probably meant that you needed to have an attitude adjustment and they would like to help you with that.

This old idiom has a broader sense in which it has come to mean carrying around something that is bothersome and something that becomes an impediment to full living.

The question of the day could be put this way: “What are you carrying around?” “Check your shoulder, what’s there?”

There they were ready to cross the Jordan. This was big stuff. They were making their entry into the Promised Land. Joshua is being elevated here as their leader. Moses had been the focus and now a new era of life was coming by the hand of God through Joshua their leader. They were making their way from the wilderness to the new land, “a land flowing with milk and honey.”

To that end, there was also order here as to how this would take place. They would not just wade into the Jordan river and swim across. Instead a procession of sorts was planned where the Ark of the Covenant would be the lead “float” in the parade, and in order would then be the people at an appropriate distance behind that.

That ark—the Ark of the Covenant—was so special. I was the sign of God’s presence among the people. It could only be carried by the priests.

This is a great scene. There are the priests bearing the ark—and I visualize it in a certain way. I see them with those long poles that extend from the bottom of the ark. In this view, the ark is hoisted above their heads and they carry it with those poles rested on their shoulders.

I see it clearly with the ark—that symbol of God’s presence—resting on the shoulders as they make their way into the Promised Land.

It is a truly great scene. Those priest bearing the ark on their shoulders step into the waters. As they step in the waters recede and ground dries in such a way that they and the people can pass over onto the other side of the Jordan. It is, if you will, a replay of the clip of what happened at the Red Sea. As they emerge onto dry ground—they step onto the very soil that was promised to Abraham and Sarah. ...a great scene!

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While we do not bear an Ark of the Covenant around as we make our way in this time and place, even as we make our way in this world—I dare say we do carry on our shoulders a symbol of who we are.

As we consider our lives we might say that we have a lot to bear. Indeed, I do believe that to be the case. There are more decisions to make

today than at any other time in history. The options are far more varied than they once were.

In addition to more choices, there are also more obligations... You name it, it comes with responsibility. So many responsibilities in our lives that after some reflection we can hardly bear the weight of all of it. So, either we don't reflect much on what we face, or we live in denial about the weightiness of all that. The result is the same—we are over burdened, over committed, over obligated, over worked, over programmed, over stimulated, over entertained, over informed, and over it!.

There is truly much on our shoulders.

So much so, that often that resentment creeps in about all there is to do and all that is expected and all that we want to do that we cannot manage to get done...and before we realize it or can control it... Ah before we realize it or can control it there it is: feeling so resentment, feelings of guilt, feelings of bitterness, and even feeling of anger.

You know what we might call that? A chip on our shoulder.

Given what we are called to carry around—is it any surprise? Given what we are called to carry around in this age and in this culture—is it any surprise?

Of course not. A chip on your shoulder. No surprise.

I would invite you to look again. I would invite you to look at your life, and see that you carry around more than burdens, more than obligations, more than responsibilities and resentments. There is more there.

It says in I John 3:1 “See what love God has given us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are.” And it goes on to say in verse 2: “Beloved we are God’s children now.”

“Beloved we are God’s children now.”

You carry that. That is in you. That is on you. That is of you. That is what you shoulder.

“Beloved we are God’s children now.”

I cannot remove the burdens of this age from you. I cannot even knock the chip off your shoulder. You might not be able to either. But I can give you this, and you can claim this -- “Beloved we are God’s children now.”

As we shoulder that—it forms us and informs us. As we shoulder that—it informs us about all those other things we carry around in this age.

Yesterday was All Saints’ Day and this is the Sunday we observe that. There are many ways of defining who a saint is. In our tradition, the best definition I know of a saint is a person who is a child of God.

What does it say in I John 3:2? “Beloved we are God’s children now.”

Put that on your shoulder!

Carry that around!

Allow it to speak to your other burdens!

“Beloved you are God’s child now.”

Oh saints, get it now—carry it around with you—wear it on your shoulder. Don’t let anyone knock it off. “You are God’s child. You belong to God.” God holds YOU—you saint. Shoulder that! Amen.