



Call to Worship - Psalm 107:1-3 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures for ever.
Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story – those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,
those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.

Hymn - STF570 - As we gather, Father, seal us

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6ODRHtO7VY>

As we gather, Father, seal us
in the love that knows no fear.
Draw us, heal us, reconcile us,
may there be a place of refuge here.
*Who share one living bread,
one Father's love, one Saviour's grace,
one Spirit's breath;
one holy communion.*

No more outcasts, no more strangers,
all dividing walls are down.

Here is love that redefines us,
dignifies the least and lowest one.
Chorus

Source of joy, belonging, friendship,
form your family likeness here.
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
that the world may know our God is near.
Chorus

Graham A. Kendrick (born 1950)

Prayer

God, we give thanks that we can gather in worship, A family of people come by invitation and not by right,
A group apparently disparate yet joined by a chord, Not seen but known, of love.

God, we praise you as we worship, For the family and the love,
For being here as we are here, Not seen, but known, within.

God, we adore you, unseen yet felt, We are still, yet often not still enough,
With racing thoughts disturbing calm, Unseen, our pressure within.

God, we seek your forgiving Spirit, Enduring love, to unpick the tangles
Of our contorted pressures, to see you. Here among us, our truth.

God of Grace, in Jesus Christ You sacrificed yourself and were restored;
You let us come in faith, sure that Unseen, our sins are gone.

May we know it true, May we tell it out, May we live it well, Unseen if not.

For Jesus' sake, Who bought, Made possible, Our freedom. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Introduction to theme - The Verge of Jordan

The euphemism of crossing a river is associated with the passage of a soul from this mortal life to what is next. Even those who believe there is nothing next may still use the concept. Crossing horizons, too, is a similarly used euphemism.

The well-known hymn, 'Guide me O thou great Jehovah', amongst others, draws on the image.

For the Jews coming to their *Promised Land*, the Jordan was a physical barrier. It marked a moment of transition and today we will see how navigating it also defined leadership.

Hymn - STF416 - There's a wideness in God's mercy

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26cyYoBqjQ8>

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice
which is more than liberty.

For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

There is plentiful redemption
in the blood that has been shed;
there is joy for all the members
in the sorrows of the head.

But we make his love too narrow
by false limits of our own;
and we magnify his strictness
with a zeal he will not own.

There is grace enough for thousands
of new worlds as great as this:
there is room for fresh creations
in that upper home of bliss.

If our love were but more simple,
we should take him at his word;
and our lives would be illumined
by the presence of our Lord.

Frederick William Faber (1814-1863)

Readings - Joshua 3:7-17 & Matthew 23:1-12

Hymn - STF744 - Come, let us join our friends above

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnEX9icS7Bw>

Come, let us join our friends above
That have obtained the prize,
And on the eagle wings of love
To joys celestial rise:
Let all the saints terrestrial sing
With those to glory gone;
For all the servants of our king,
In earth and heaven, are one.

Ten thousand to their endless home
This solemn moment fly;
And we are to the margin come,
And we expect to die;
Ev'n now by faith we join our hands
With those that went before,
And greet the blood-besprinkled bands
On the eternal shore.

One family we dwell in him,
One church, above, beneath,
Though now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream of death:
One army of the living God,
To his command we bow;
Part of his host have crossed the flood,
And part are crossing now.

Our spirits too shall quickly join,
Like theirs with glory crowned,
And shout to see our captain's sign,
To hear his trumpet sound.
O that we now might grasp our guide!
O that the word were given!
Come, Lord of hosts, the waves divide,
And land us all in heaven.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Sermon - Exaltation and Respect (Joshua 3:7)

The Lord said to Joshua, 'Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so that they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses.'

Looking back to this autumn's political party conferences and forward to the next general election we cannot but be aware of the importance of leadership, the importance placed on leadership and the popularity of leaders in political processes.

Businesses need leaders, as do the professions and even in vocational situations, leaders emerge.

It is probably natural to question and discuss the attributes of those who lead us but if we look at our history books, we can find stories that remind us that it is the most difficult situations that grade leaders by capability; when times are demanding, leaders must be competent and not merely popular.

Politics has a problem because of this – competence and popularity are not always mutually inclusive.

What Joshua had to prove as a Leader and how he achieved it.

Moses had died. He led the Israelites all through their desert journey following the escape from Egypt and miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. It was a natural assumption that he would be first into the new place.

Instead, we find the Israelites confronted by the Jordan in full flood. They are on one bank and Canaan, the Promised Land, is on the other bank. A practical problem which is overshadowed in hindsight by the momentousness of the moment. The crossing into Canaan ended an era and started the new life of promise – forty years of expectation hinged on this – and dry feet. The miracle and the moment are testimony to God and his faithfulness where his promises are concerned – and not for the first time. There are similarities with the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea.

The miracle we read of validated Joshua's position as a leader – he was raised in the eyes of the people and accrued respect because of the experience of the people that day. Up until then he was known to be Moses' successor but now, he is recognised as that because of experience. It is not until people experience at first hand the effect of good leadership that the leader is truly exalted and respected. Until then, everything is hot air and froth.

How did Joshua do it? *Not alone, that is for sure.*

The Ark of the Covenant is best defined colloquially as a mobile focal point for God; for those needing something tangible to help them stay attuned to God, the Ark was crucial and despite being an object it accrued respect. The ark was carried into the flood waters, and they were held back, allowing safe passage over the river for the people – so like what happened earlier at the Red Sea.

There are plausible explanations for the miracle, inevitably, but the explanations do not lessen at all the gift of knowing how to manage the situation decisively and keep people safe. That defines leadership and it defined Joshua.

What to avoid in Leadership.

So, if the Jordan crossing led to the exaltation of Joshua in the eyes of the Israelite, it is not to be assumed that anyone purporting to serve God will be respected by those they influence.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus invited those who would lead others to adopt a different style. The approach he called for was the one he adopted – to be more interested in service than status. He contrasted what he wanted with what the people were getting – leaders who taught them well with words but whose living examples were not fit to be followed. The leaders we need are not purveyors of empty words but people who will, conversely stand in the Jordan to ensure the safety of those crossing to the other side. What Israel got in Joshua, as in Moses before him, was a person they could respect for his exalted position was earned, not assumed.

Leaders who use 'I' a lot, or say 'you must' are the sort who make a big noise about praying but never speak to God; exaltation is a shared thing – respect comes from standing in the Jordan alongside the people they should be keeping safe.

What to look for in Christian Leadership.

Our Christian faith is about a bigger picture than the immediate problems of today, although of course they feature. We need leaders who can use different media and ways of showing us the picture. The imagery of crossing the river is often used euphemistically to help us with the process of death – to help us understand a journey we cannot comprehend fully until we make it for ourselves.

Psalms 107 envisions people coming together from all points of the compass to reunite; something foreshadowed in words sometimes used as an invitation to the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Gathering is what we do; in our opening hymn, Graham Kendrick wrote, 'draw us, heal us, reconcile us' in a place of refuge, a place of safety. The concept of unity in another place is even more enticing, the hope that death resolves problems that are intractable in life, just as the Promised Land was to be the solution to cruelty and slavery, even if the journey there was a tough one.

Faber's hymn, 'There's a wideness in God's mercy' is his way of leading us to glimpse an expansion of God's attitude to us in his lavish graciousness. And then Wesley leads us closer to the image of the river as he saw 'the

narrow stream of death' being crossed. As we sing those words it is as though Faber, Wesley, Kendrick and others stand with us in the Jordan to help us to see what they can see. Sometimes, imagery is too delicate, and we need a blunter form of leadership and so it is that on Easter Day and at other times too we sing with Edmund Budry of Jesus meeting us and lovingly greeting us as he steps from his tomb, risen from the dead.

I can respect and exalt people who lead me like that, with lovingly crafted word pictures and help me see. They are with me, and I sense their closeness – how about you; what works for you and what do you respect and who do you exalt as one who leads you towards God. I dare bet, whoever they are, you sense them standing in the Jordan with you, not shoving you off the bank to sink or swim on your own.

May God be praised for vision and hope, for leaders we can respect and for the everlasting promise.
Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

God eternal, you lead us, incite us, call us, welcome us – Everything about the way you treat us tells of your grace.

We pray for those who feel adrift in the world, Lost and without any sense of being led.
Be with those who stand in difficult places And help them know that you are there.

We pray for those in the world who are leaders, Striving to be the best they can, putting themselves where people are. Be with leaders and give them the empathy and courage To know that we need them beside is in the river.

We pray for those who lead badly or who are badly led, Ignorant of needs or abusive of power.
Be with those who suffer because of cruel dominance and help them feel that nothing is hopeless.

We pray for the many other needs of those around us, And especially, we pray for those facing their final journey soon. They may be afraid, or suffering in body, mind, or spirit. Stand with them, we ask.

We pray for people who are supporting others in need, People who minister or nurse, who love or support, People who mourn and grieve. Bless them help them know blessing.

We pray for all who are dealing with the ordinary pressures of life, People who are living with difficulties or difference in life, People who are marginalised or vilified. Be strength for them, and recognition with them.

Jesus Christ, you made the journey safe for us – You gave yourself in death for our life.
We bring our prayers in thanksgiving, Coming in your Spirit's power. **Amen.**

Hymn - STF313 - Thine be the glory

Watch on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KufEOJ_lvnU

Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son;
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave clothes where thy body lay.

*Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son:
Endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won.*

Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;
lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom.
Let his church with gladness, hymns of triumph

sing;
for her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting.
Refrain

No more we doubt thee, glorious prince of life!
Life is nought without thee; aid us in our strife;
make us more than conquerors, through thy
deathless love:
Bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above.
Refrain

Edmund L Budry (1854-1932), translated by Richard B Hoyle (1875-1939)

Benediction

May God bless us in all our journeyings, our crossings and re-crossings until we find our safe home in that presence which is eternal and real. The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. **Amen**