

**+ Joshua 5:13-6:5, 20 + Our God Is a Man of His Word +**  
**+ The Second Sunday after Pentecost + 6 June 2010 +**

“How can we possibly get past this city?” Joshua stared up at the towering walls of the city of Jericho. The citizens had heard that the Israelites were coming. They had heard frightening reports of the Israelites and the power of Yahweh—the Israelite God, whose plagues had humbled the mighty Egyptian empire. They had heard how he parted the Red Sea for the Israelites to cross on dry ground while their enemies were drowned. He had won victories for them against impossible odds and conquered the lands across the Jordan. He had parted the Jordan River at flood stage so the Israelites could cross over on dry ground. The mighty city of Jericho was next, so the king and his citizens locked down the city. The walls were high and thick. The defenses and defenders were sure. The Israelites would only destroy themselves against such impregnable defenses.

Joshua was no slouch either. He had commanded Israel’s armies for over 40 years. He had won many a victory with the Lord’s help. Months before he had become the new leader of Israel. The Lord himself had given him this promise, **“Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”** Joshua had led the people across the Jordan when the Lord miraculously parted the waters at flood stage, but as he stared up at the defenses of Jericho, this one seemed impossible. It was clear that Joshua’s skills and Israel’s strength could not ensure victory.

Just then Joshua **“looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword.”** Bravely Joshua went up to the man and asked, **“Are you for us or our enemies?”** The man answered, **“No, as commander of the LORD’s army I have come.”** The Lord wasn’t taking sides, but wanted Joshua to know that if Israel had any hope of victory, they had to be on God’s side, fighting for the Lord, and following his will. In reverence, Joshua bowed low to the ground and asked, **“What message does my Lord have for his servant?”** The man told Joshua, **“Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.”** Joshua understood that the Lord would be with him and with Israel. If Israel shed its sinful disobedience, like Joshua’s sandals, and if it fought the Lord’s battles with reverent obedience, then the Lord would ensure victory for Israel. No one could stand up to the Lord and his forces as St. Paul would write centuries later, **“If God is for us, who can be against us?”**

As Joshua looked again at the towering walls of Jericho, the Lord had a much more specific promise for his people. **“See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and fighting men.”** It was as good as done. The Lord was giving his word to Joshua and Israel. The mighty city, all inside, all its weapons, and all its reputation for never being conquered would fall into their hands within a week. Still the Lord would test Joshua and Israel to see how much they trusted him and his promises. **“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 all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in.”**

Any of us in Joshua’s position would’ve probably said, “You’ve got to be kidding. March around one of the mightiest cities in the region once a day for six days and then shout at the city on the seventh day so the walls will collapse? That’s impossible!” ...But that wasn’t Joshua and that wasn’t Israel. We don’t find any doubt in the entire account. They had heard what the Lord had promised time and again. They had seen what the Lord had done time and again. After all, the Lord had brought them to the Promised Land. Why would they not trust him now when the odds seemed impossible? They trusted that their God was a man of his Word.

The next morning Joshua sent them out. The armed guard marched at the front, followed by seven priests, who blew their trumpets, but no one shouted a war cry. Levites carried the ark of the LORD behind them and the rear guard followed. They marched around the city once and returned to camp. They did it again early the next morning and the next day and the next day until six days had passed. You wonder if the people of Jericho laughed at them from their towering walls wondering what those foolish Israelites would do next, but soon the seventh day arrived.

On that day, the Israelites marched seven times around the city. On the seventh time, when the priests blew their trumpets, Joshua commanded the Israelites, **“Shout! For the LORD has given you the city!”** The Israelite army shouted with all their might. **“The wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city.”** Everything happened just as the Lord had said. God kept his Word. That day the city of Jericho was leveled and the Lord was victorious. Joshua and the Israelites really did nothing. God did everything. He

collapsed the walls and gave the city into their hands. Soon he would win victory after victory for them throughout the Promised Land. He gave them every reason to trust in him, because he kept his Word to them. Their God was a man of his Word.

That wasn't the only time however. In fact, our God proved himself to be a man of his Word against even more impossible odds. Ever since our first parents disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, the rot and decay of sin has ruined every thought, every word, every action of every human being. By nature, every one of us is disgusting in God's sight worthy only of eternal death in hell. In fact, if you and I were to step back and see how disgustingly covered with sin we all are, our rescue would seem impossible.

In spite of the odds though, our God had a plan to save the world, yet even that seemed as improbable as his victory at Jericho. This long-promised Savior was born of a virgin mother in her teens, who was likely considered an outcast because her pregnancy started out of wedlock. The baby was born in a stable, a cave really among the stench and noise of the barnyard, because every available room in the village of little old Bethlehem was taken. The infant's first cradle was a feeding trough filled with fresh hay. Jesus grew up in a God-fearing home, but in poverty in a backwater town of a backwater region of a backwater province in the mighty Roman Empire. Once he became an adult, he became a popular teacher, but rarely had a place to lay his head. The crowds were often as quick to turn on him as they were to follow him. In fact, at one point, nearly all of his followers left him because of his teaching. Even the religious leaders of the people opposed him, but still Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, and proclaimed the Gospel. A time came, however, when he was betrayed, arrested, beaten, ridiculed, flogged, and condemned to die a criminal's death on a cross. Then he was raised from the dead and now rules all things for the good of his people. Such a plan would seem ridiculous, if it came from anyone other than our God.

Remarkable, isn't it? Astonishing? Impossible? We could say that, but our God is a man of his Word. For centuries, the Lord had kept the line of the Savior intact, even wiping out all but eight people with a flood to preserve that line. Over the centuries, God had promised that his Son would leave heaven and become the Babe of Bethlehem, a Son of Man to save us. He would be a Suffering Servant and take on the sins of the world as the Lamb of God. In the end, however, he would stand victorious as the Risen Lord. Amazingly, every single promise came true. Impossible? Not to our God!

Our God is a man of his Word. We even see that in the improbable way he wins over our hearts and saves each of us through his Gospel. Through the hearing of that good news of Jesus he creates faith in our hearts. Through a little water outpoured and connected with that Word, he gives us new life and welcomes us into his family. Through a bite of bread and a swallow of wine, he gives us himself—his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Through it all, our God does everything. We do nothing. We could say "Impossible!", but our God is a man of his Word.

How is it that the Lord gets you through this life? How is it that the Lord gets you through those times when grief or guilt overwhelms? How is it that the Lord overcomes your sins with forgiveness, your death with life, your despair with hope, your worry with peace, your sadness with joy? How does the Lord care for and grow a congregation like ours? At first glance, it would seem impossible, but nothing is impossible with our God. After all, he saved us!

Remember what the Lord has promised and what he has done! Our God is a man of his Word, so take him at his Word! Boldly trust that he knows what he's doing when he says he's going to do it! When life is overwhelming, trust him who overcame the world for you. When guilt is too much, trust him who bore that burden for you. When the bills pile up and you wonder where the money will come from or you worry about your job or you worry about your health or the health of a loved one or the little problems in this life that suddenly become impossible, trust him who promises you grace and every blessing in life and in death, in sickness and in health, in good times and bad. We have even more reasons to trust our God than Joshua.

Trust him, because our God doesn't kid around. He's a man of his Word and he will do exactly what he has promised and more. He proved it at Jericho, where he won the battle not Joshua, not Israel. He proved it at Calvary, where he won the battle, not you or me. He proves it right here in our homes and our church as we see the blessings of his Gospel in Word and Sacraments flourish among us. Like Joshua, then, trust the Lord of free and faithful grace, for your God will always be a man of his Word. Amen.