**SERMON 3-1-2020**

**JOSHUA 6:1-16, 20**

Some time ago, a gentleman in the Soviet Union

          traveled to see the Moscow Circus for the first time.

He was well entertained, and thoroughly enjoyed all of the performances.

Near the end of the show, a beautiful lion tamer invited a lion to come to her.

The lion then put his paws around her,

          and he snuggled close to her with great affection.

The gentleman called out: "What so great about that? Anybody can do that!"

The Ringmaster heard his comment and challenged him:

“Would you like to try it?”

"Absolutely," the gentleman answered. "I certainly would like to try it.

“But first you have to get that lion out of there.”

The Ringmaster answered: "No, you don't understand.

          The lady comes out, and you go in all alone with the lion."

The gentleman looked at the lion and said to the ringmaster:

“No. I won't do that!”

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

A man watched with amazement as his new next door neighbor

          built two high towers in his large back yard.

Then the neighbor strung a wire between the two towers.

Each day the neighbor strung the wire higher and higher between the two towers.

The man watched his neighbor each day as he walked along the wire

          pushing a wheelbarrow between the towers.

One day the man asked his neighbor, "What are you doing?"

The high wire artist answered, "Getting ready to cross Niagara Falls!

          Do you think that I can do it?"

"Yes, I think you can do it!" the man answered.

Each day the neighbor raised the wire higher and higher

          and practiced walking the wire with the wheelbarrow.

Each day he asked the man, "Do you think that I can do it?"

"Yes! I believe you can do it!" was always the enthusiastic reply.

Well, the big day finally arrived, and thousands of people came to watch

          the high wire artist perform his stunt.

The performer saw his neighbor in the crowd and called out to him:

“Do you think that I can do this?”

“Yes! Yes!" the man answered confidently. "I know you can do it!”

"Well, then, Get in the wheelbarrow!" said the wire walker.

The man stared at his wire walking neighbor and said: "Absolutely not!"

Both the gentleman at the Moscow circus,

          and the neighbor of the high wire performer, enjoyed the show.

They believed, but one wouldn't get into the wheelbarrow,

          and the other wasn't going to join the lion.

They made no commitment to step into the cage, or get into the wheelbarrow.

They were not really fully involved, they didn't really want to be part of the show.

The idea was just too unusual, and strange, and scary.

Yet commitment is essential for walking with God and living his way.

Without commitment, we cannot follow in his footsteps.

Without commitment, we are not fully involved,

          we are not really a part of the show.

Notice the difference 40 years in the desert made.

Those who had lived in slavery in Egypt grumbled, and murmured,

and complained and whined.

But now they had all died off.

Their offspring now faced overwhelming odds with renewed hope.

On the surface, not much had changed in 40 years.

Yet, in another sense, everything had changed.

The Israelites had no chariots, or even horses.

They had only primitive weapons, an untested new leader,

          and long-delayed marching orders from God.

Yet this new generation had decided to trust God, no matter what.

They had learning to follow instructions.

Once inside Canaan, the Israelites followed God's instructions precisely,

          even when doing so must have strained their faith to new limits.

The residents of Jericho had shut themselves behind stone walls,

          awaiting the onslaught of the feared Israelites.

Guided by God, the nation of Israel met with unprecedented success.

The book of Joshua tells of a new sense of hope and a spirit of success.

It is the story that it can work, people really can follow and obey God.

The Old Testament does offer a few bright spots of hope,

          the book of Joshua being one of the brightest.

With Joshua's leadership and God's direct involvement in history

          the Israelites were successful, at least for a while.

A wall stood between the Israelites and success.

We have faced mighty walls in our lives also.

We want to do God's will. We want to live as his people.

But there is this huge wall of doubts and difficulties.

Somehow we have to get around, or through that wall of problems.

We are so often faced with obstacles, and doubts.

There is a gap which needs to be bridged, a wall which needs to be removed.

Often we are unable to remove it. We have to depend on God.

We need to trust him and follow him,

          even when we are not sure where we are going or how to get there.

The walls and obstacles are often too much for us.

But God is able to handle them.

When we are willing to put our action with our faith,

          God can get us around, or through, the difficulties.

Yet often we are too confused, too afraid, to let God do a new thing in our lives.

Those who lived in Jericho knew an attack was coming,

          but they didn’t know when.

It must have been terrifying.

Yet, probably before very many days passed by, the fear began to wear off,

          and the Canaanites started laughing at those "crazy Jews".

The Jews silently marched around the city day after day, in silence,

          and then returned to their camp.

They didn't give up. They didn't shout insults at the citizens of Jericho.

They simply obeyed God's directions, even when they could not understand

          why it was important to do things God's way.

Marching around the city was not only an act of obedience, but also an act of faith.

Those within the walled city were probably confused, and amused,

          at the Israelites' actions.

By the seventh day they had most certainly felt secure.

They probably felt no concern about the strange actions of the silent Israelites.

The Israelites were doing as God commanded.

They may have been walking in circles, but they were doing as God directed them.

On the seventh day they walked around the wall seven times.

And as God had commanded, when they finished that seventh trip around the city,

          the priests let out a blast on the trumpets.

The trumpets the priest were sounding were not the trumpets to announce battle.

They were the trumpets used in worship.

These trumpets were the ones used to signify

          that the presence of the Lord was in that place.

These were the trumpets of Jubilee and Praise.

As the shout of praise went up, the walls collapsed.

The Israelites charged straight in, and they took the city.

Following this victory, the Hebrews continued for some time to follow

          God's directions.

Listening to Joshua and following him, they were successful for many years.

The Israelites had free choice.

After all God had done for them, they still faced a fundamental choice.

They could worship the gods their ancestors had served in Egypt,

          or they could follow the religious practices of the new lands they entered,

          or they could follow the God who had freed them from slavery.

The choice may seem obvious, but temptations, and barriers, and walls

          often complicated their choices.

We, also, have to make many choices.

Those same temptations, and frustrations, and doubts, and barriers,

          often complicate our choices also.

Near the end of this book Joshua showed that he knew exactly

          which direction he and his family would take.

He told the Israelites:

Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness;

          put away the gods your ancestors served beyond the river and in Egypt,

          and serve the Lord.

Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve,

          whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the river,

          or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living.

But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

The choices we make each day make all the difference in our lives,

          And in the world around us.

AMEN