

“God At Work” (128)

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FBCB

August 13, 2017

Joshua 3:7-17

Everyone needs one of those little squares of paper with the words “God At Work” on one side. We’ll be using these in a bit, so keep it handy.

Today we are considering a part of the story of Joshua. Joshua was the Israelites new leader who was to lead them into the Promised Land after Moses died. Their hope was to finally have a place to call home after generations of slavery in Egypt and a generation living as nomads in the desert. To have that permanent home they needed to cross over the Jordan River.

Hundreds of years before, the land over the river was the land of their ancestors — their great, great, great, great, great, great grandparents.

But while they lived in Egypt, all kinds of other people had been living in the land of their ancestors. God told the Israelites that they would be given back their land, and the people who had been living

there heard about this promise, and were afraid.

They were afraid because they were aware of the mighty works of the God of the Israelites. They knew about the work God did to free them from slavery in Egypt, and how their God parted the Red Sea.

The Israelites were also hoping that God would work through Joshua, just like God did through Moses.

We can imagine they were a bit nervous though. It was a big deal to cross over the river. They had longed for this day for all of their lives. Was God going to go with them? Was God going to work for them again?

Read Joshua 3:7-17

This story is an example of an event that the people of Israel recognized as a work of God. They did so, but not so much because the waters of the Jordan River were stopped allowing them to walk across on dry ground.

You see, the Jordan River was not so deep and often people could wade across in places. If they had a drought like we sometimes have here in Michigan, or certainly like

the multi-year drought in California, people could easily make it across.



There are even times when natural events have been known to stop the waters of the Jordan from flowing. For example, back in 1927, an earthquake caused a landslide that stopped the Jordan's waters for a whole 24 hours.

However, what was so amazing for the Hebrews — what had them see God's hand at work — wasn't that the land was dry to get across, but that the water of the Jordan stopped at just that moment so they could enter the Promised Land. The people recognized this immediately as the work of God.

They didn't stop and reason it away saying, "Oh, that was only an earthquake so it wasn't God working." or "Oh, that kind of thing happens now and then from natural causes."

For all of their stubbornness, there was one thing the Israelites had going for them. They noticed God's hand at work.

God is also at work all around us, if we can only notice.

I have a couple of stories to share with you to highlight God's work in our midst. As you listen, I encourage you to be thinking about your own life, and the life of this church and where you see God at work.

When you think of somewhere you see God at work, grab a pencil from the pew rack, or pen from your purse and write a quick note or word about it on the back of that little piece of paper so that you will remember. For an extra credit bonus, share about that time with a friend or family member.

That piece of paper can go in your wallet or purse, on the dash of your car, on your refrigerator, or some other important place to remind you of where God is at work in your life.

The Violinist

First story: In Washington DC, at the Metro Station, on a cold January morning in 2007, a man with a violin laid his hat on the

ground in front of him and played six Bach pieces for about an hour.



During that time, approximately 2,000 people went through the station. Most of them were on their way to work.

After about three minutes, a middle-aged man noticed the musician. He slowed his pace and stopped for a few seconds, and then he hurried on.

After about four minutes, the violinist received his first dollar. A woman threw money in his hat, and without stopping she continued walking.

At six minutes, a young man leaned against the wall to listen, then looked at his watch and started to walk again.

At ten minutes, a three-year old boy stopped, but his mother tugged him along hurriedly. The kid stopped to

look at the violinist again, but the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk, turning his head the whole time. This action was repeated by several other children, but every parent without exception forced their children to move on quickly.

After 45 minutes, the musician played continuously. Only six people stopped and listened for a short while. About 20 gave money, but continued walking at their normal pace.

After one hour, he finished playing and silence took over. He collected \$32 that people had left in his hat. No one noticed or applauded. No one knew that the violinist was Joshua Bell, playing in disguise in the Metro Station. Bell is considered one of the greatest musicians in the world. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written, with a violin worth \$3.5 million dollars.

Two days before, Bell sold-out a theater in Boston where the seats averaged \$200 each to sit and listen to him play the very same music he played at the Metro Station.

This event was organized by the Washington Post as part of a social

experiment about perception, taste and people's priorities.



Sometimes we miss something great sitting right under our noses.

Have you missed God at work in your life because of your perception, busy schedule or priorities?

Agnes of Albania



Second story: In 1910, Agnes was born in Albania as the youngest among her siblings. At eight years

old Agnes' father, who had a career in politics, died.

Very early in her life Agnes was fascinated by missionary work, and by 12 she was convinced that she could give her life to religious work. By the time she was 18, she headed off into the mission field and never saw her family again.

She went to Ireland and learned English, then to India and learned Bengali and taught children in several Catholic schools. At 21 years old, in 1931, Agnes took her vows to be a Roman Catholic nun.

She enjoyed teaching in the school, but she couldn't help but be troubled by all of the poverty in the area surrounding the school in West Bengal, India.

God drew her attention into those neighborhoods. She was there during a bad famine in 1943 and then horrible violence in 1946 stemming from a Hindu/Muslim clash that left the area in shambles.

God nudged Agnes to leave the convent that had supported her and provided for her, and out into the streets to live among the poor and while there help them in the best way that she knew how. She had

no money and no home and had to beg for food in order to eat.

Her ministry was to the poorest of the poor. She recognized how difficult life was for people who were so poor. She could identify as one of them. Her ministry was to...

...the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, the lepers, all those people who feel unwanted, unloved, uncared for throughout society, people that have become a burden to the society and are shunned by everyone.

People in the government of India pretty quickly took notice of what Agnes was doing and thanked her for her work. She gained the blessing to start a new congregation called the Missionaries of Charity, and a number of homes for those who were dying. She empowered others to work along with her doing God's work.

As Agnes' notoriety increased, so did the criticism she received from many people through the rest of her life. They claimed she was hypocritical, took money from bad people, used her clout to further her own agenda, among other complaints.

She continued her work until her death in 1997. Agnes, as you have probably figured out became known as Mother Teresa, now Saint Teresa of Calcutta. She has often been lauded as a remarkable woman of faith who continued to live in poverty and do God's work literally in the trenches where few others would.



While tirelessly doing this work, Mother Teresa also questioned her faith, experienced doubt and struggled in faith throughout her life right up to the end. She often said that she didn't hear from God — that God was silent for her.

Perhaps Mother Teresa was so close to God's work that she was unable to see the big picture and notice, as the world had, that God was working through her hands and comforting words to those facing their most difficult moments, which

to her seemed ordinary and common.

Where have you missed God working in your life, perhaps because you were so close to it?

Where do you see God at work now?

Noticing where God is at work is a learning process. Well, actually, it is more of an unlearning process.

We are taught from about the time we are born to see the world through the eyes of reason. So we reason away God's presence and God's handiwork.

Not being able to see what God is doing is not a new thing.

When Jesus was born into this world, very few people recognized that God was at work. He was from Nazareth and people said "Can anything good come from there?"

Others said "Isn't he the carpenter's son?" They knew him and his family and knew for sure that God couldn't possibly be at work in him.

People expected Jesus to be a political leader because that was how they thought God would have to work to bring salvation to the

people. How could a humble person from a low-class rural family change the world?

And yet he did!

Could God be at work in your life without you realizing it?

Most of the time we think about finding God where things are going well. When we experience good things in life, we call them blessings from God. But we have come to believe that God is only at work when things are going well.

This is where we need to unlearn something. We need to rewire our brains to understand a bigger God.

More often God shows up in the unexpected places — those places of difficulty, those places of pain, those places where things are unsettled, out of order, and in turmoil — in the mess of life!

Did you hear about the brutal attack suspected by the Taliban in northern Afghanistan last Sunday that left 50 people including innocent women and children dead?

Or did you hear about the bombing and shooting of worshipers in a Shia mosque in Herat Afghanistan

on August 1st that left 32 dead and 60 injured?

At last count, from terrorist attacks alone there have been more than 5,100 fatalities throughout the world in this calendar year alone.

And today we consider the looming threat that is the violent banter thrown back and forth between North Korea's President Kim Jong-un and President Donald Trump. Now Guam, with its 160,000 United States citizens, is in North Korea's crosshairs.



Will this escalating banter end in nuclear war? What will be the cost?

“Where is God?!!!”

As we look back through scripture and through history. Nearly all of the stories of God's work are in the middle of turmoil, pain, and mess.

God was present at the moment each of those bombs went off in Afghanistan. God was present with those who were injured and with those who were killed. It may not have made the news, but I assure you that God was there.

God is in the middle of the mess working to bring relief and justice, peace and grace.



Where is God? Where is God at work?

When you are feeling at your most weak or you face a situation that looks unbearable or seems impossible, I encourage you to look for God there.

You can wake up each morning expecting that God has already been at work not only in the world around you, but in your life.

May we unlearn our typical way of seeing God's presence only when good things happen, and open ourselves to see God in a fresh way.

Hang onto that little piece of paper that says "God at Work" on it. Jot down a couple of words that will remind you of some way that God has worked in your life unexpectedly. Let that remind you of our creative and loving God who meets us in the mess of life.