

June 23, 2019
2nd Sunday after Pentecost
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
The Lord Brings Down the Walls

Joshua 5:13–6:5, 20 (NIV84)

Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” ¹⁴ “Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?” ¹⁵ The commander of the LORD’s army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so. ¹ Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. ² Then the LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. ³ March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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.”

²⁰ When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho
Joshua fought the battle of Jericho
And the walls came a-tumbling down

That is a fun children’s song about the battle of Jericho and I have no problem with the Sunday School children or anyone singing this to remind them of the account before us in God’s Word today. However, as with many simplified songs, it does not tell the whole story. Yes, Joshua was the human leader in the battle of Jericho, but it was the LORD who really fought the battle. And the battle plan was not so much of a battle plan but a parade around the city each day with a shout and trumpets at the end. And it was not Joshua or the Israelites who brought the walls a-tumbling down. The Lord brings down the walls of Jericho. As we look at this familiar story today, we keep the focus on the actions of the Lord and seek to be on his side.

Is the Lord On My Side?

Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” ¹⁴ “Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.”

Joshua is being a good leader and surveying the situation before the battle. The Israelites have just crossed the Jordan River in a miraculous way as the Lord stopped the water upstream to allow them to cross on dry ground. Now the Promised land was in front of them. They were to take possession of it. However, the

walled city of Jericho was in the way. Joshua would be planning his tactics for the upcoming battle as he looked over the area around Jericho. Joshua bravely confronts the man with a drawn sword to find out whose side he was on.

The man Joshua meets is either an angel of the Lord or the angel of the Lord, God himself. Later he tells Joshua to remove his sandals because the place he is standing is holy. That is what the Lord told Moses when he spoke from the burning bush. Whose side is he on?

Whose side was God on in World War I or World War II? What about in the American Civil War or American Revolutionary War? Whose side was God on in the Thirty Years War in Europe? The winners will usually claim that God was on their side, that their cause was just and right in God's eyes. We might be tempted to think that that Lord is on Israel's side in the battle of Jericho but the command of the army of the Lord says, "No." He is neither for Israel or for their enemy.

We may think that because we are Christians the Lord is for us more than for others, or for us instead of being for others. In a disagreement with a family member we might act like God is on our side to win the battle. When we have coworkers who don't work like we think they should, we might think that God is on our side because we are hard workers. When our friends say and do ungodly things, we become convinced that God is on our side and not on theirs. But the Lord says through his messenger to Joshua that he is on neither side.

The Lord is on his own side. He will do what he says he will do. The Lord promised to give Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan. So the Lord brings down the walls of Jericho to give the land to Israel. The Lord will also carry out his threats against those who reject him. The people of Canaan had centuries to repent and turn from their idol worship and wicked ways. The Lord will now use Israel to bring about his justice upon them. But in the very next chapter, he uses the small village of Ai to defeat Israel and rebuke them for their sin. God is on God's side and he wants all people to be saved.

When the walls come a-tumbling down, one section does not. The section of the wall with Rahab's house remains because she had turned from false gods to the Lord who made the heavens and the earth. She will marry an Israelite man and eventually one of their descendants will show that God is for all people. Jesus will die in the place of every sinner. Christ paid for our sin even when we were God's enemies. If we ask the question, "Is God on my side?" the answer is always "Yes" in Christ. If we ask if God is on my side instead of on my opponent's side, then the answer is "No, Jesus came to be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. He is for all people." A

The God who brought down the walls of Jericho and brought us into his family through Christ, now wants us to be on his side.

Am I on the Lord's Side?

Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. ³ March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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."

From a military perspective, this is a horrible battle plan. Wear out your army by marching around the city every day. Expose your most valuable treasure, the ark of the covenant, to the enemies. Expose your defenseless priests to the enemy. Use shouts and trumpets to knock down a wall. This is crazy. Why would Joshua agree to this? Why would the people agree to do what Joshua passed on from the Lord? Joshua had been through the Red Sea on dry land about forty years ago. The others had grown up in the wilderness and God gave them food six days a week in the form of manna. Their clothes and sandals did not wear out. They had just crossed the Jordan River at flood stage on dry land. So when God says to march around Jericho, they gladly march. They march by faith. They blow the trumpets by faith and they shout on the seventh time around Jericho on the seventh day by faith. The Lord had never lied to them but had delivered them again and again. They wanted to be on the Lord's side and by faith they obeyed his instructions.

Because the Lord Jesus gave his holy and precious blood to cleanse us of all our sins and deliver us from sin, death and the power of the devil, we too want to be on the Lord's side in life. Because the Holy Spirit gave us faith in our baptism, we want to listen and obey God's instructions for our life. Jerico, Iowa is just under three hours away. We can probably still make it there today in time to make one lap around the city. But God has not asked us to march around a city or take possession of a new land. However, the Lord has asked us to do and to believe some things that are just as crazy in the eyes of the world, some things that are difficult for us to do.

Just last week, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul instructed us to rejoice in our sufferings. Many in the world turn away from the Lord when suffering enters their life. We are to turn to the Lord. God tells us that Jesus died and then rose bodily from the dead on the third day. Only by Spirit given faith can we believe this and hold onto this belief and the belief that Christ will raise us when our last day arrives. Jesus asks us to live in the world but not be of this world. We are to live pure lives in a world that is impure in thoughts, words and actions. And every one here has at times joined with the impure world. Believe that Jesus has cleansed your sin and continue to live in this world by faith in the Son of God who died for you. The God who brings down walls at Jericho asks us to live humble lives before him and others, to serve others as Christ has served us. Humility is not easy. I'd rather march around a city.

God does not ask us to believe that he will bring down walls by shouting, but tells us that he saves someone by putting water on them connected with the Word. Jesus tells us that he gives us his own body and blood and that we receive real forgiveness when we eat and drink his body and blood together with the bread and wine.

We would never do any of what God asks us to believe and do if we followed our own plans for life. But by faith we want to be on God's side. We have seen through the Bible how God delivered his people again and again – Noah, Moses, the Red Sea, the wilderness, the Jordan River, the walls of Jericho and on and on until Jesus came as the greatest deliverer. By faith we want to believe and do whatever our Savior tells us. We want to be on his side.

Amen.