

4 When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, **2** “Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, **3** and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.”

4 So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, **5** and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, **6** to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ **7** tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.”

8 So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the Lord had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down. **9** Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been[a] in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day.

A Memorial Still Stands

We love memorials. It's probably because they recall good days. They honor the fallen. They remind us from where we've come and what we've accomplished along the way. In almost every town throughout the country you'll find memorials to significant events in history. Sometimes those significant events are a bit of a stretch and towns are simply trying to find a claim to fame and call attention to themselves. Because of this I've often called historical markers - historical markers. Sometimes they serve the purpose of calling attention to something significant and then again sometimes these memorials get lost in a sea of markers meant to draw attention to any and everything that has happened in history.

People have been setting up markers for a long time. Joshua and Israel set up a historical marker of some sort not to draw attention to themselves but rather to bring attention and remind people of what God has done for them in the past. It wasn't about them at all. It was not about their beautiful work but it was all about their faithful God who carries his bride across the threshold of the Promised Land.

You would think that it would be impossible to forget such a thing. But we're forgetful people. We forget important events and have a need for constant reminders. Sometimes we forget what's most important to us in life because we're so busy. God knows we forget. It was true of Israel and it's true of us. God gave his people a reminder of his faithfulness, his love, and his power. This memorial still stands.

Joshua tells us a memorial stands to this day. Twelve stones are stacked but what happened here? How did they get here? God led Israel through the waters of the Jordan and carried them into the Promised Land. Forty years earlier he did the same thing with their parents. He led them through the waters of the Red Sea on dry ground. He protected them from the advancing Egyptian Army. He delivered them from slavery in Egypt. But so soon they forgot. Complaining about leaving Egypt, *"If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."*

Because of their rebellion and rejection at the threshold of the Promised Land they wandered and waited forty years until an entire generation died off. Now, they've waited, wandered, and looked forward to the fulfillment of the promise. It's like you're going home for the first time when they are stopped again. I don't know about you but at this point I'd start throwing a fit. Because something so simple has stopped them. The Jordan is at flood stage. They're stuck. They haven't even made it to Jericho and they're already met with defeat. Talk about a blow to the pride. They can't do this on their own. They can't even cross a river.

God brought them to an impossible situation where the only option was God and God did something about it. God did the same thing he had done for Moses. Israel walked through on dry ground. He held back the waters of the Jordan protecting his people. They are finally home. But before they go one step further the Lord wanted to remind them and all who would come after them what he has done. So he directs Joshua to have twelve men select stones from the river bed and set up a memorial. Every time they see this pile they will remember how God walked with and among his people. Joshua explains, *"In the future, when your children ask, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord when it crossed the Jordan."* This marker serves to remind one generation after another of God's faithfulness. These stones signify that God has kept his promise. These stones stacked with meaning an unmistakable marker for a purpose. Rather than rebel and reject, they are led to repent and rely on God's power to lead them into the Promised Land.

Do you see the historical markers? No, not twelve stones this side of the Jordan, but there are markers and memorials that God has given to us. Here at church, the altar, cross, pulpit, baptismal font, and all remind us what God has done. But a roadside marker does not good if left unexplained, if we race past without a second thought, left unseen on a regular basis as we eagerly make our way through life. But then sometimes there are the impossible odds, another river at flood, maybe a hurricane, wildfire, earthquake or health issue that forces you to stop and it's at those times we may act like Israel and forget.

But, we're busy and it's easy to forget. Our minds are focused on the urgency of the now. Far too often we are focused on ourselves and our own interests that we fail to remember significant events. We may remember those events that call attention to us. These memorials that still stand are not about us. These memorials do no good if left unseen, out of sight, unexplained, and driven past without giving it a second thought like all of those historical markers we drove past on our vacation because I was so focused on, "Get there... Get home."

Have not earned or deserved any of these. We are forgetful, busy. Filled with worry and fear because when good times turn bad not as likely to be seen in church let alone find comfort in the memorials that God has set up for us. Even though we've forgotten God - God has not forgotten about us.

So he set another monument, another memorial pointing to an event greater than the deliverance from Egypt, bigger than the conquest of Canaan.

Throughout their entire wandering in the desert the Ark - God's presence went ahead of them. 2000 cubits in the distance. ½ mile behind the ark until it stopped in the middle of the Jordan. The people crossed over and around the ark. God was now among his people. God was in their midst. God is not distant. The people could see with their own eyes the effects of his presence among them. So that each time the Israelites saw it they would be reminded that they had not crossed the Jordan on their own ability, their own strength but because of God.

But in a greater way God would walk among them. Not in the tent of a tabernacle or in a box of the ark but in the tent of a body. Jesus entered into our world of suffering, took up our pain, our problems and reminded us of God's love and mercy. He then set up another simple memorial made from two beams. A memorial that reminds us God keeps his promises. A memorial that reminds us that God forgives rebellion, forgetfulness, and pride. Every time we see this memorial we are reminded that we have not earned salvation by our own ability or strength but because of God.

God then set up additional markers along the way. Markers in creation and conscience “*God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us*” (Acts 17:27). God set up reminders for the faithful to stop, look, listen, and learn what he has done and will continue to do for us.

Do you see the markers? As you enter church you’ll see them. The cross reminds us of his sacrifice. The baptismal font reminds us that he has called us by name and brought us into his family. The pulpit points us back to God’s Word and his desire to be known by us. Then there on the altar we are reminded of his body and blood given for us. Then there is the hymnal that reminds us that God not only speaks to us in worship but he also gives us the opportunity to return our praise to him. The new hymnal project is dedicated to a generation not yet known. These serve a purpose for his forgetful people.

Set up markers, memorials for the next generation. Joshua had twelve men, select twelve stones, to be arranged in one monument. There was work for every one of them, involving every tribe through a representative. It wasn’t a costly memorial. It didn’t require hours of work created by masters. It was built out of river rock. They serve as a reminder of what is most important and that often has very little to do with glitz and glamour as they give glory to God and advance the gospel. So whatever you do be it a memorial or a monument may it lead others to ask a favorite Lutheran question, “What does this mean?” It means, “sins are forgiven, full assurance, salvation now.”

God’s past faithfulness assures us of that. What he has done in the past is a guarantee for the future.

Historical markers may serve a purpose. We spent time jumping from one to another as we made our way down the interstate. We saw the Salt Flats, the site where Jesse James robbed the first moving train in the world, and even historical markers like Wall. But remember these historical markers that point you back to God and his work for you. See these memorials that still stand when you face significant events and impossible situations because you may not see how God will take care of you now but he has been faithful to you in the past. He remains faithful to us in the present. He will carry us on into the future. May everything we do point us back to what God has done. Amen.