

Joshua 4:1-8

When the entire nation
had finished crossing over the Jordan,
the LORD said to Joshua:

²Select twelve men from the people,
one from each tribe,
³and command them,

"Take twelve stones from here
out of the middle of the Jordan,
from the place
where the priests' feet stood,

carry them over with you,
and lay them down
in the place
where you camp tonight."

⁴Then Joshua summoned
the twelve men from the Israelites,
whom he had appointed,
one from each tribe.

⁵Joshua said to them,
'Pass on before the ark
of the LORD your God
into the middle of the Jordan,

and each of you
take up a stone
on his shoulder,
one for each of the tribes
of the Israelites,
⁶so that this may be a sign
among you.

When your children ask
in time to come,

"What do those stones
mean to you?"

⁷then you shall tell them
that the waters of the Jordan
were cut off
in front of the ark
of the covenant of the LORD.

When it crossed over the Jordan,
the waters of the Jordan were cut off.

So these stones
shall be to the Israelites
a memorial for ever.'

⁸ The Israelites did
as Joshua commanded.

They took up twelve stones
out of the middle of the Jordan,
according to the number
of the tribes of the Israelites,
as the LORD told Joshua,

carried them over with them
to the place
where they camped,
and laid them down
there.

Matthew 28:16-20

16 Now the eleven disciples
went to Galilee,

to the mountain
to which Jesus had directed them.

¹⁷When they saw him,
they worshipped him;
but some doubted.

¹⁸And Jesus came
and said to them,

'All authority
in heaven and on earth
has been given to me.

¹⁹Go therefore
and make disciples
of all nations,

baptizing them
in the name
of the Father
and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit,

²⁰and teaching them
to obey
everything
that I have commanded you.

And remember,
I am with you always,
to the end of the age.'

Reading the Former Prophet This Week

We're reading Joshua 4 this week,
varying the lectionary at the request of guest John Lougheed
Next week, we'll rejoin the wider church tour through Genesis

For context, see 'Reading Joshua in a Settler Church'
posted fall 2021, with audio recording from Easter 2018:
<http://www.hereticslikeus.com/2021/09/introducing-joshua.html>
<http://www.hereticslikeus.com/2021/09/thursday-week-1-joshua-4.html>

Joshua picks up the grand literary conceit from Deuteronomy,
600K people ending their desert exodus by crossing Jordan
a vision of settlement or conquest shaping our colonial identity

We read it as an origin story of our existential right to be here:
who's the 'we', and what's the 'here', for you?
We've already crossed the Jordan, and 12 are sent back

These tribal reps fetch 12 stones from the riverbed,
where the priests stood as the people crossed over
as the waters were held back, echo of the Red Sea

The stones are assembled into a shrine at Gilgal
memorial between Jordan crossing and fall of Jericho
that we crossed together as God permitted

John will share with us some of his roots,
including his great-grandfather Rev John Wesley Johnston,
first minister at Woodford and Silcote after church union 1925

How do you tell your origin story among a wider story –
can you count 'seven generations' as indigenous tradition asks,
in order to contemplate 'seven generations' to follow?

How do we memorialize those existential claims,
piling up stones that mean something different over the ages,
subverted, if ever they had an imperialistic subjective intent?

Have you ever seen the 12 stones from 1925's 12 conferences,
in the General Council office lobby, for regions not just tribes?

Reading the Gospel This Week

We won't read Matthew 28 in worship this week,
but it's appointed for Trinity Sunday in this year of Matthew,
and keeps our rhythm of half hour spent on each of 2 texts

The "Great Commission" of this gospel is familiar,
parallel to Luke and Acts formulae of recent weeks to witness:
'in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Galilee, ends of the earth'

As 2 women told them, 11 disciples go to Galilee
v 16 'Galilee of the nations' Isa 8:23
the nations *ethne* of v19 flow to an abstracted 'mountain'

The authority claim echoes Daniel 7:14 apocalyptic
but we read it after 2 millennial of imperial conversions
is this a universal tyranny – or some in each of all nations?

We use this text in baptism liturgies – a command to do it
implying a range of repenting, believing, belonging
in an imperative, transitive verb – and our descendants?

The reach to nations echoes through a dozen points in Matthew
reaching beyond the original ethnic roots in Judea-
the rhetoric sounds different in imperial Roman Latin, eh?

similarly, we read a trinitarian formula 'father, son, spirit' here
yet these signifiers had a different signified meaning –
developed to the 4th century ecumenical creeds

what if we asked the 'formation' question about 'in the name
of'

what do you have to learn about God to be baptized, live it out
and what do you have to do about it, to walk the walk?

Rather than trying to grow our market share
of consumers of baptism, a 'head count' of 'us'
what if our witness in transformed lives is the product?