

Summit Presbyterian Church
Preached by Rev. Sue Cyre
10/30/11
Title: Walking with God: Going in Circles
Text: Joshua 6:1-20

This story of the walls of Jericho is a familiar Sunday School story and there have been children's songs written about the "Walls coming tumbling down."

The Hebrew people have now crossed the Jordan river—Jericho is about 5 miles from the Jordan. If they are going to conquer the land, this is the first city they must conquer. But, this isn't a story about a mighty battle.

It's a strange story. It's a strange way to conquer a city. Imagine the Hebrew people getting up early in the morning, eating breakfast and then all the men of military age—probably 600,000 of them—lining up. Half of the military men were in front, then came 7 priests with trumpets, the Ark of the Covenant, followed by more military men in the rear.

This parade walks around the walls of Jericho once. While they do, the priests blow the trumpets. There is to be no talking—no idle chit-chat and no taunts directed at the people inside Jericho. The only sound is the sound of feet walking and the mournful wail of the rams' horns being blown.

Remember when Sennacherib surrounded Jerusalem, Sennacherib taunted the people of Jerusalem who climbed up on the wall to see the army that surrounded them. But, there is no taunting here at Jericho. Just silence except for the sound of marching men and the sound of the trumpets.

After this parade walks around the walls once. They march in military array back to their camp and disband. That's it. Each day they get up in the morning and do that same thing--after walking around the walls they go back to their camp and wait until the next day when they do it again.

On the 7th day, there is a variation in the plan. The men rise at dawn, get in formation and today they walk around the walls not once but seven times and after that as the trumpets blow, Joshua commands the men to give a loud shout. As the mighty shout goes up from 600,000 men the walls fall down completely. The men go into the city and destroy it completely.

What is the application for us this morning? First, God did it all. The men obeyed God's word certainly. But, they did nothing except walk around the walls.

The men didn't use weapons; they had no plans to tear down the walls, they had no battering rams to knock down the gates; they didn't build ladders to scale the walls. They

didn't even try psychological warfare and taunt the people to try and convince them that it was hopeless and they should surrender.

The Hebrew army just walked in silence around the walls with trumpets blowing. God did the rest. God conquered the city. The military men just put one foot in front of the other and walked in circles, day after day.

The walking, must have looked silly to the military men. What army wants to conquer a city by simply walking around it day after day. It's silly. I imagine there was a lot of complaining each day as they lined up in military array. There were probably people saying, "What a waste of time. I have better things to do with my time. This is ludicrous. The people in Jericho are laughing at us and calling us wimps because we won't fight, we just keep on walking and blowing trumpets."

It is ludicrous. No city was ever conquered by merely walking around it day after day. No city but Jericho.

God did it all. God could have destroyed Jericho without the Hebrew army walking around the walls. God certainly didn't need these men to walk around the city day after day. But, God allowed the men to be part of his plan. He allows us to be identified with him.

God loves us and values us. He calls us to go to work for him. To be on his team. We work for the living God. We're his army. God doesn't need us to care for the sick or help the poor, or proclaim his Gospel. But, he allows us to be on his team, part of his conquering army.

Yet, it's very clear. We're just walking. The miracles are God's alone. The miracles are a result of his power and glory and might. We do nothing but walk.

Sometimes I suspect we feel like we're walking in circles going no where. We're busy from morning until night but we don't see results. Every day is just ordinary—very ordinary—very routine. We just put one foot in front of the other and keep walking. Every morning seems the same. Drive the car, clean the house, go to work, do the wash, fix the car, drive the children to their soccer games. At the end of the day we're exhausted, but we don't see results.

But, in the midst of our ordinary walking God is bringing down walls. Walls of resistance to the Gospel in family members; walls of unbelief; walls of grief, sorrow and pain; walls of fear; walls of loneliness; walls of doubt; walls of sin; walls of death. The walls are going to fall. Is it us doing it? No. It's God who topples the walls. We just keep on walking.

God even says the walls of hell will not prevail against the church. We are going to see the gates of hell fall. Is it our doing? No, we're just walking—keeping on keeping on—being ordinary—being faithful. Day after day—walking as God directs us. Knowing that God is in our midst just as he was with the men who marched around Jericho—the ark was a sign

of the presence of God. God was there. The Hebrew army knew that and they kept on walking.

God does extraordinary things through very ordinary people. The walls of Jericho falling was extraordinary—it had never happened before and it has never happened since. God did it. Just as God almost over night toppled the Berlin Wall—and the Iron Curtain. God did extraordinary things through ordinary people—because they just kept walking. Trusting what God could do.

I wonder if the ordinary men that Jesus chose as apostles, ever dreamed that through them the world, the whole world, would come to hear about Jesus Christ. They were very ordinary men, who just kept walking. And the Holy Spirit used their words to break down walls of unbelief.

Fishermen, and tax collectors, shepherds, and tree pruners; young people, old people, men and women—all ordinary folks, all willing to walk and keep on walking even when they saw no results. Most of the prophets saw no results from their efforts—in fact what they saw, was persecution, imprisonment and rejection, even death. But, they kept on walking.

Those who agreed to walk, did it in obedience. Sometimes, it seemed silly as it did walking around the walls of Jericho—it was hardly a stunning military maneuver. Military men told by their leader, Joshua, to walk in circles—how silly, how ridiculous. But they did it and when they did it, God performed a miracle and the walls came tumbling down.

Remember Naaman, the captain of the Syrian army? He was a leper. The Israelite slave girl who worked for Naaman's wife convinced Naaman to ask Elisha to heal him. But Naaman doesn't go to Elisha, the prophet, instead he had a letter sent from the king of Aram, or Syria, to the King of Israel, asking the king to heal Naaman.

This is how the Bible describes Naaman, "Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy."

The king of Israel receives the letter from the king of Syria and tares his robes and wails, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me?" The king of Israel can't cure Naaman and he starts to think that the whole reason the King of Syria asked him to cure his army general was to start a war. He would have to refuse to heal Naaman and the Syrian King would start a war.

Instead, Elisha hears about the letter to the King of Israel and sends a letter to Naaman telling him to go and wash in the Jordan river 7 times and he would be healed. Elisha doesn't even meet with Naaman—he send him a letter telling him to wash 7 times in the Jordan River.

Namaan is furious at such a silly idea. He feels like Elisha has made a fool of him—and he's a captain in the Syrian army. He expected that Elisha would ask something enormous, something only a revered captain of the Syrian army could provide. He expected Elisha to ask for lots of money, or that Namaan would conquer a city, or do something powerful that only a revered army general could do. Instead, Elisha says go take a bath.

Namaan says, “Behold I thought He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leper. ...Are not the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean. So he turned and went away in a rage.” In other words, don't play me for a fool.

But when the Israelite servant girl convinces Namaan to bathe in the river, he is cured. Obey—keep walking—no matter how fruitless it seems, no matter how silly it seems, no matter how strong the walls appear—keep walking cause they're about to come down. And realize that while we are part of this plan...it is God who is performing the great miracle.

Do you know the reason God told the Israelite army march around the walls? It was to allow them to be associated with God—they were part of the miracle. When folks spoke about God, they thought of the Israelites.

When they saw the Israelites, they thought of God. Where one was, the other was. When one acted the other acted. God and the people—in covenant relationship. You can't have one without the other. Seeing one—the Hebrew people, pointed to the other, God.

The other reason God told the Israelite army to march around the walls was to show God's glory. If the Israelite army had not marched around the walls and the walls just fell down one day, the people of Jericho and the people from the other towns in the Promised Land may have thought an earthquake toppled the walls, or that there was a structural problem, or just an act of fate or bad luck.

But, the army marching around the walls pointed to God. They were in relationship with God. When the walls came down it was clear that God did it. The army didn't do it. But they were like a 1000 watt bulb pointing to God. Have you ever seen search lights that are sometimes set up to advertise a sale some car company is having. You see the light and look for its source. The army of Israel was like a search light causing folks to look for the source. They obviously had something to do with the walls falling—yet they didn't do it. Where is the source? God almighty.

We're the search light pointing to the source. We're just walking. But because of our relationship with God, when the miracles come—folks look beyond us to the source.

Are we willing to be ordinary Christians, doing ordinary things that in God's hands become extraordinary? Are we willing for our ordinary days to be used by God to shine on his glory?

Listen to how God brought glory and tore down walls because people kept walking. “Edward Kimball, who lived in the 1800s in Boston, was determined to win his Sunday school class to Christ. One of the boys, a teenager, named Dwight Moody, tended to fall asleep on Sundays so Kimball, undeterred, set out to reach him at work.

.....Dwight Moody was a shoe salesman. Kimball entered the store where Moody worked and “I put my hand upon his shoulder, and as I leaned over, I placed my foot upon a shoebox. I asked him to come to Christ.” But Kimball left thinking he had botched the job. His presentation of the gospel seemed halting, and he was downcast. Moody, however, left the store that day a new person and eventually became the most prominent evangelist in America.

.....Years later on June 17, 1873, Moody arrived in Liverpool, England, for a series of crusades. Moody visited a Baptist chapel pastored by a scholarly man named F. B. Meyer who was transformed by Moody’s message.

.....At Moody’s invitation, Meyer toured America. At Northfield Bible Conference, he challenged the crowds saying, “If you are not willing to give up everything for Christ, are you willing to be made willing?” That remark changed the life of a struggling young minister named J. Wilber Chapman.

.....Chapman became a powerful traveling evangelist in the early 1900s and he recruited a converted baseball player named Billy Sunday. Under Chapman’s eye, Sunday became one of the most spectacular evangelists in American history. His campaign in Charlotte, North Carolina, produced a group of converts who continued praying for a powerful visitation of the Spirit. In 1934, they invited evangelist Mordecai Ham to conduct a citywide crusade.

.....On October 8, 1934, Ham sat alone in his hotel room, dejected and discouraged. His evangelistic campaign in Charlotte was faltering, the newspapers were blasting him the churches were fighting him, and he seemed powerless to do any good. He prayed that God would pour out His Spirit and make this city tremble.

.....The Lord answered his prayer beyond all expectation. For among Mordecai Ham’s converts during that 1934 Charlotte, NC campaign was Frank Graham’s tall, blue-eyed son—Billy. And Edward Kimball thought he had botched the job!”

“Albert McMakin was a twenty-four-year old farmer who had come to faith in Christ. He was so full of enthusiasm that he filled a truck with people and took them to a meeting to hear about Jesus. There was good-looking farmer’s son whom he especially wanted to get to a meeting, but this young man was hard to persuade. He was busy falling in and out of love with different girls and did not seem to be attracted to Christianity.

....Eventually, Albert McMakin managed to persuade him to come by asking him to drive the truck. When they arrived, Albert’s guest decided to go in. He was spell bound and began to have thoughts he had never known before. He went back again and again until

one night he went forward and gave this life to Jesus Christ. That man, the driver of the truck, was Billy Graham. We cannot all be like Billy Graham, but we can all be like Albert McMakin—we can bring our friends to Jesus.” Just keep walking, sometimes in circles and watch God bring down the walls of hostility, of disbelief.

A Sunday School teacher that kept walking, a farmer that kept walking, a preacher that kept walking. They all faced discouragement—because they didn’t see the walls come down. They were just walking, circling, waiting—very routine actions, very ordinary people. But, at the sound of the trumpet God brought the walls down and brought the victory. (From Alpha material)

One more story, “During the war a man was shot and lay dying in the trenches. A friend leaned over to him and said, ‘Is there anything I can do for you?’ He replied, ‘No, I am dying.’”

.....“Is there anyone I can send a message to for you?”
“Yes, you can send a message to this man. Tell him that in my last minutes what he taught me as a child is helping me to die.”

.....The man was the soldier’s old Sunday School teacher. When the message got back to him, he said, “God forgive me. I gave up Sunday School teaching years ago, because I thought I was getting nowhere. I thought it was no use.” (from Alpha material)

Sometimes walking is so hard. We don’t see the walls coming down and we get discouraged, we feel silly, we grow weary. The walls may be all kinds of walls in our lives or in the lives of our family members.

God says, “keep on walking—every day, get up and do it again.” And one day, the trumpet will sound and the walls will fall. Not through our effort. But, through God’s power and might. And when the walls fall, because we have been faithful in our walk, people will see God’s glory and power.

When Christ was born, it was very ordinary—a stable, a young couple, a winter night. But, out of the ordinary came the salvation of the world. Out of the pain of death, came victory and life everlasting. In Christ, there is no wall that can ever stand. May we keep on walking in very ordinary ways, and be search lights pointing to the power and glory of God—that all may know and see the face of God.

Amen.