STEP INTO THE WATER!

Ps. Njoro – 26 Jan 2014 – Step Out Series
SERMON NOTES

STEP INTO THE WATER! - Jos.3:1-8, 14-17, 5:1

This month we have been going through a series called ‘Step Out’, where we’re saying that God’s word for Mavuno in 2014 is that your time has come to step out into fearlessly influencing the various zones of influence He has placed you in, including your family, your workplace and your society. In week one, we learnt from General Joshua that stepping out will require our courage, obedience and initiative. The second week we learnt from Rahab, she of J Street, that faith is not real unless it is backed up by actions of surrender and therefore you must, ‘let God’s agenda define your agenda’. Last week, from our two agents, 001 & 002, we began to understand that to step out, we must renounce a grasshopper mentality and put on a God-centered mentality, because ‘what you focus on determines your reality’. This week we want to conclude our series with one of the most amazing stories in the whole of scripture. But before we do so...


Much grace to you! Please turn to Joshua. READ Josh 3.1-8, 14-17, 5:1

Early the next morning Joshua and all the Israelites left Acacia Grove[a] and arrived at the banks of the Jordan River, where they camped before crossing. [2] Three days later the Israelite officers went through the camp, [3] giving these instructions to the people: “When you see the Levitical priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God, move out from your positions and follow them. [4] Since you have never traveled this way before, they will guide you. Stay about a half mile[b] behind them, keeping a clear distance between you and the Ark. Make sure you don’t come any closer.”

[5] Then Joshua told the people, “Purify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do great wonders among you.”

[6] In the morning Joshua said to the priests, “Lift up the Ark of the Covenant and lead the people across the river.” And so they started out and went ahead of the people.

[7] The Lord told Joshua, “Today I will begin to make you a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites. They will know that I am with you, just as I was with Moses. [8] Give this command to the priests who carry the Ark of the Covenant: ‘When you reach the banks of the Jordan River, take a few steps into the river and stop there.’”

14-17....
So the people left their camp to cross the Jordan, and the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant went ahead of them. It was the harvest season, and the Jordan was overflowing its banks. But as soon as the feet of the priests who were carrying the Ark touched the water at the river’s edge, the water above that point began backing up a great distance away at a town called Adam, which is near Zarethan. And the water below that point flowed on to the Dead Sea until the riverbed was dry. Then all the people crossed over near the town of Jericho.

Meanwhile, the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Lord’s Covenant stood on dry ground in the middle of the riverbed as the people passed by. They waited there until the whole nation of Israel had crossed the Jordan on dry ground.

Josh5:1...

When all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings who lived along the Mediterranean coast heard how the Lord had dried up the Jordan River so the people of Israel could cross, they lost heart and were paralyzed with fear because of them.

They had spent their whole lives dreaming about it, longing for it and fantasizing about it. Their parents too had longed to see such a day but none of them had made it. But now, the Promised Land finally lay within their grasp. The place they had only heard about in stories, sometimes wondering if it really existed, now they could see it with their eyes! Only one problem though – between where they were and where they needed to be, there was a large river. Normally, the Jordan was only 100 feet wide at Gilgal, the place where they were crossing, and not very deep. But v.15 tells us that it was the harvest reason and the Jordan was in flood. Historians tell us that today, the Jordan River contains only 3% of the water it had just 100 years ago. In essence, the flooded river that the Israelites encountered would have been a noisy, thundering, rushing torrent over a mile wide in some places!

So there they stood, hundreds of thousands of men, women and children, with a huge barrier between them and their Promised Land. Surely, after 40 years of wandering around the desert, why couldn’t God have chosen a more convenient time for them to arrive at the Promised Land! Like the dry season, perhaps! The reality is that the majority of them probably couldn’t swim – after all they were a generation that had been born and raised in the desert. And even if some could swim across, perhaps like the spies, you can almost hear their dismayed questions over the 3 full days that they camped by the river – ‘how are we supposed to cross that with thousands of infants and expectant mothers and those who are unwell, as well as all our possessions and animals?’

Here’s something we need to note right away – God’s route is not always the most convenient. Sometimes we seem to think it is. We decide things for God – ‘I don’t like my job anymore so God must be asking me to move’. ‘I’m not happy in my business or enterprise, it must not be God’s will’. Or ‘this marriage isn’t going well, surely God will understand if I leave’. But we need to understand that sometimes God allows things to become impossible before they get better so that He can demonstrate to you that He is the God of the impossible. In the past you may have known God as your Provider, but now He wants you to know Him as your Deliverer. And you cannot know that unless things are so
impossible, that you need to be delivered! Your tough situation may be just the platform that God is setting up to perform a miracle. Or put differently, your impossibility is God’s opportunity!

As the Israelites camped by those raging waters, Joshua gave them three clear instructions. I believe that these are God’s instructions to us as well, as we step out as a church into 2014.

The first is **Keep Your Eyes On God** - v.3 ‘When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. Then you will know which way to go since you have never been this way before’. The Ark of the Covenant was a wooden chest overlaid with gold which represented God’s Presence. Since God was calling them to step out into the unknown, where they’d be all kinds of risks and dangers, the one thing that would keep them safe was keeping their eyes on Him. The bible is very clear that they were to keep a distance of 1000 yards between them and the ark. Why is that? How come this is the first time they’d ever gotten such an instruction in 40 years? Well, picture the scene – the whole nation is encamped on a sloping hill beside the Jordan River. The ark is 1000 yards (just under a kilometer) in front of them. It seems to me that God did not want the ones in front crowding the ark so others couldn’t see it. He wanted everyone to be able to see it for themselves.

2014 is our year to Step Out. I believe that this year, God is calling us to do things that we have never done before and to take risks that we have never taken before in order to impact our families, our workplaces and our society like we’ve never impacted them before. But for us to step out, we must keep our eyes on Him, reading His word regularly, listening to Him keenly, responding to Him daily. **Don’t let others listen for you!** I want to say this – gathering together for worship every Sunday is important – don’t just come when it’s convenient. You see that’s when we listen to God’s directions for the community of faith that we belong to. Also, your Life Group meeting is important – don’t make it optional. Why? Because that’s where we apply God’s word together and encourage one another. But none of these should be a substitute for listening to God for yourself and learning to hear His voice. **If You’re Going To Do Things You’ve Never Done Before, Then You Must Do The Things That You’ve Never Done Before.** That’s the main lesson I believe we’re learning today. You can’t do what you did last year and hope for a different result! For you to step out this year, you must keep your eyes on God and learn to hear Him for yourself.

The second instruction is **‘Cut Off The Distractions’** - v.5 ‘Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you’. Consecration meant that they were to purify themselves. For the Israelites, this involved rituals like washing their clothes, taking a ritual bath, and abstaining from sexual intercourse. These rituals basically represented in a physical way the spiritual act of renouncing of their sins and stripping away those things from themselves that might cause them to miss out on what God was doing. The idea was to enter into a state of spiritually alertness. You see God was planning to do some amazing things among them and He didn’t want them to miss it!

We started our 40 day fast on Monday and conclude in Feb 28th. We are preparing ourselves spiritually for the things God is going to do among us in 2014. Consecration means that we set aside the typical and put our spirits on alert so that we don’t miss out on what God desires to do in our lives. This year,
my wife and I decided to fast differently (24hrs drinks only for 14days) – just because I know how huge a year this is for us. This will be a historic year for all of us! And so I challenge you this season, don’t just miss that lunch. **The idea is not to starve ourselves in order to prove how faithful we are!** Instead it’s to remove distractions so we can spend time hearing God. So – take a prayer break at lunch time and walk around the place where you work. Spend some time praying for your family/workplace/role in society. Some of us need to cut off TV and even the internet as that’s your biggest distraction! Let’s prepare spiritually & mentally for what God intends to do. **If You’re Going To Do Things You’ve Never Done Before, Then You Must Do The Things That You’ve Never Done Before!**

The third instruction given to the priests was the most startling - ‘**Step Into The Water’** - v.8 ‘when you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river’. That’s it! Nothing said about what was supposed to happen next. We sometimes think of these guys boldly striding towards the water. But I suspect that’s far from the truth! I can imagine what they were thinking... ‘Eh – wait a minute - what if I drown! Why cant we first get a stick and poke it in to see how deep? Why can’t we wait for a couple of months – I mean what’s the hurry? What if Joshua didn’t hear right?’

Don’t you sometimes wish God would show you exactly how things will work out in the future before He asks you to do something? The interesting thing in scripture is that often, God provides no solution to our problems until we take a step of faith and obedience. God is waiting for us to step out into the water before He opens the way for you. Maybe you’ve been praying for your husband or wife to change. Nagging them more this year is not going to do it! What if this year you focus becoming the best you that God created you to be? Maybe you want to have a huge impact and impact the lives of many in your generation. But what if this year you take a step of faith and start with whatever little you have? **If You’re Going To Do Things You’ve Never Done Before, Then You Must Do The Things That You’ve Never Done Before!**

There are great stories in Mavuno of people who took God at His word and stepped out in faith.

**Brian Walusimbi**-Started ‘Bless a child home’ that gives medical care to cancer kids who cannot afford. He built a home for them so that he can offer education, spiritual care and counselling as they go through their mediations.

**Christina Ntulo**- Runs BasicNeeds Foundation Uganda is a Ugandan NGO whose vision is to see an improved quality of life for people who have or are experiencing mental ill health. In partnership with the districts of Amuru, Oyam and Nwoya, 3549 youth (1545 male and 2004 female) have been supported to start income generating activities. The support has been in form of training on how to select and run a success business even if it is agricultural based, how to work together in groups (206 self help groups exist) and how to run success village saving and credit schemes. The youth have also received life changing skills and knowledge on preventing HIV infection, maternal and child health, understanding the link between of poor gender relations and poverty and of course poor mental health and poverty.
Liz Kirui and Friends - Have started The Dorcas Ministry to bring women who can use their creative gifts to make things for charity. In the process the women get to share and pray together for their kids and marriages.

Lisa Mdogo - Started A celebral Palsy foundation to support other women who have children suffering from this condition noting that many women have been chased away by their husbands because its considered an omen. Currently she has 36 women that she helps.

We call them our Frontline Initiatives. There are many, many others at Mavuno who have listened to God and stepped out to impact families, education business, media, the arts, the environment, politics and so on and this year, you will get to hear some of their stories!

Tell your neighbor ‘step into the water!’ What are those things you’ve been praying for your family/workplace? Perhaps the next time we talk about our frontline initiatives, you will be among them! You may not think you’re qualified. None of these were. But they’re a great testimony to us of the truth, that If You’re Going To Do Things You’ve Never Done Before, Then You Must Do The Things That You’ve Never Done Before!

So look what happened when their feet touched the water. The bible tells us that the water upstream stopped flowing. We sometimes imagine that this was like the Red Sea, a narrow passage cut into the water for them to cross. But this was a whole different level! The bible tells us the water backed up far upstream at the city of Adam. This is some 32km north of where the children of Israel were crossing. The river went dry from there all the way to the Salt Sea, or Dead Sea, which – get this – was a whole 189km away! In other words, 220km of river just dried! So think of all the people who were swimming, or fishing, or taking a bath or washing their clothes! You see, God didn’t just help Israel but He did it in a spectacular fashion! No wonder then that news about it got around pretty fast. 5:1 tells us ‘When all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings who lived along the Mediterranean coast heard how the LORD had dried up the Jordan River so the people of Israel could cross, they lost heart and were paralyzed with fear because of them’. This wasn’t just for the Israelites to see. God wanted to show off His power to the nations!

Here’s the thing. I believe strongly that God will bless us this year as we step out. Like Joshua, He will raise us up in the eyes of our peers. But remember it’s not about you. In the end, the most important thing is that God will be glorified and people around you will see that He is real. God is looking for ordinary people that He can use to show off His extraordinary power to the nations. He is looking for people to demonstrate His power to our watching families, workplaces and ultimately to our society.

But remember, it won’t just happen. If You’re Going To Do Things You’ve Never Done Before, Then You Must Do The Things That You’ve Never Done Before!