2nd Sunday after Pentecost – Year C – June 2, 2013 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY

Based on Joshua 5:13-6:5, 20 written by Pastor Paul Horn

**“Have Faith in the LORD’s Power… The Wall of the City Will Collapse”**

*13 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.*

He was just doing his job, minding his own business, and that’s when he saw it… something unnatural. So he went over to investigate. It was a shrub on the side of the mountain that appeared to be on fire, but it wasn’t being consumed by the fire, so he walked up to it, and a voice said, “Take off your sandals. You are standing on holy ground.”

It was then that the LORD commissioned Moses to lead his nation, some 2million people now, out of Egypt, after over 400 years in slavery, Moses would march the people out of Egypt, with not one arrow shot, not one slice of the sword, and through the middle of the Red Sea, and there God would destroy Pharaoh’s army and chariots, they would march to Mount Sinai, where the LORD established his covenant with his people, but then as they marched toward their inheritance, the property of Canaan, they rebelled and disobeyed the LORD, and so God forced them to wander in the desert for 40 years until those who rebelled were buried in the desert.

After 40 years it was time, time to receive their gift from the LORD, the land promised to Abraham almost 500 years earlier, and when they reached its borders, Moses died, because he, too, had disobeyed the LORD’s commands. So Joshua, who had been Moses’ aid and right hand man, became the commander of Israel’s army. His mission was to destroy all the nations living in Canaan, the heathen, godless, unbelievers, who had rejected God’s will. God would bring his righteous judgment on them through the sword of the armies of Joshua. He did not want his people influenced by their heathen practices, their sinful lifestyles.

The first city they encountered was Jericho, a city which had gained reputation over hundreds of years. Archeologists have discovered this city. It was built on top of a large mound, had two walls, which were very thick. Archeologists guessed that if you stood at the based of that mound, the top of the second wall would have towered 70 feet above you! How in the world would a commander tactically approach this impregnable stronghold?

Our lesson finds Joshua deep in thought, perhaps pondering the intel he had received from the two spies who had returned from the city prior to their arrival. Now, the commander of God’s people stood not too far away from the city, calculating his move. He looked up and out of nowhere a Soldier was standing right in front of him, sword drawn, ready for battle! Joshua, unafraid, boldly approached him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” Naturally as commander of Israel he needs to know.

The stranger’s answer is surprising, “**No, as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come**.” Much ink has been put to paper to determine who this man with the sword is. Some scholars say that this is Michael, the archangel of God, the chief angel of the armies of angels in heaven, who fights for God’s people. Other scholars say that this commander of the Lord’s army is the Son of God himself in bodily form. He used the same words that the LORD had spoken to Moses from the burning bush, “**Take off your sandals, Joshua, you are standing on holy ground**.” Regardless of who this man is, he now has arrived when the battles are about to begin. He comes with the armies of the LORD, because no battle can be fought or won without the armies of heaven working behind the scenes. Joshua’s skills and the strength of the army will not win this battle.

Despite its intimidating power, the commander of the LORD’s army reassured Joshua, “**Behold! I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.”** The commander spoke as if Joshua and the Israelites had already conquered the city, the victory was certain with the LORD fighting for them, in spite of the odds.

But why did the LORD plan this seven day military exercise before he delivered the city into their hands? It seemed frivolous, to march around the city once a day for six days, and then on the seventh day, march around it seven times and then shout? The LORD was building them up with this physical and spiritual exercise. The walls would collapse because of the LORD’s power, not their cries or trumpet blasts or the power of their army, but the LORD’s army of angels would cause those walls to crumble. The Soldiers of Israel had to obey his command, they had to put their faith and trust in the LORD, no matter how ridiculous this battle plan seemed to them. The LORD forced them to trust him and direct all their faith toward himself. What appeared to be an impossible wall to destroy, God would work his power to do the impossible. He promised, **“The wall of the city will collapse**.”

What kind of wall stands in your life, a wall that needs to be destroyed? Over the past few months, I’ve listened to members talk around church, comments made in Bible classes, topics brought up in counseling, and searching my own heart, and it appears that one of the major walls that stand in the hearts of God’s people today is the wall of “not being able to forgive…” the wall of hate and anger and animosity.

I think that this is a wall in our hearts because it does not allow us to walk the path of our Christian living. This wall does not allow us to mature and grow in our faith. This wall does not allow us to live our lives for Christ, which is what we want to do.

I believe that these walls still tower over us for several reasons. We rationalize our anger and our frustration toward these individuals, we justify our gossip and slander of them… for a number of reasons. First of all, we may feel that they need to apologize first, otherwise, because otherwise there’s no way we’re going to forgive them. Secondly, we may feel that because they offended us so greatly, hurt us emotionally, maybe even spiritually, that we cannot get past their sin. Or maybe they haven’t done anything to harm us personally, but their attitude, the way they carry themselves just bothers us and we hate them for it.

What we’ve done is set standards for them, and they couldn’t reach our standards, which is ok with us because it makes them look worse and me better. But hasn’t God done that for me? Hasn’t he set a standard for me? Hasn’t he commanded me, that regardless of their attitude, whether or not they apologized, regardless of what they continue to do to our hearts, God commands us to love, to forgive, to practice patience and kindness?

Which burns us up, which makes me rage all the more, because “I can’t do that!” Why not? Because maybe I haven’t even asked him to help me tear down this wall of “not being able to forgive.” I haven’t asked because I know it’ll mean setting aside my pride and ego. It’s much easier to gossip and slander and rage at them. It’s easier to pick out their faults and their sins rather than focus on my sin, which is failure to love and forgive. Or maybe I did ask God to help me tear down this wall, and I haven’t seen any results. I have forgiven, but anytime this person’s name is even mentioned, my blood boils and I have to start all over again.

Could this be the spiritual exercise God is putting you through? Just as he did with the Israeli army - they were forced to trust him to knock down those walls. Could it be that God is forcing you to trust him, to put your faith in him to destroy that wall of hate, and rage, and unwillingness to forgive?

This spiritual exercise begins with repentance. The Israelites had to do that prior to their march around Jericho. They had to repent and confess their sins, so they recognized that they could not do anything without the LORD. So also, in faith we repent of our sins. We focus not on the sins of others, but ours. I confess that I have not met God’s standards. My sins have put a wall up between me and my God, and I deserve God’s wrath and anger.

The other part of repentance is forgiveness/absolution. After the Israelites repented of their sins, they celebrated the Passover. They thanked God for his deliverance from Egypt. They thanked God for the blood of the lamb, painted on the doorframes of their ancestors’ homes, which caused the angel of death to Passover them and spare them. In repentance we too, look to God and he shows us the true Passover Lamb, who came to earth to live in obedience to God’s standards. He loved all people. He was patient with those who hated him. He was kind to those who offended him. He even forgave those who put him to death. Yes, he lived in perfect obedience to the Father’s standards. Not only that, the Passover Lamb painted his blood on the beams of the cross to satisfy God’s wrath.

God says to you, “You have offended me with your sins, but I have forgiven you. I have knocked down the wall of your sins and transgressions. Because of the Passover Lamb, not only have I forgiven your sins and offenses, I have forgotten them. Impossible! We cry. A God who knows all things, who knows the recesses of my heart, can forget my sins? Yes! His promise, **“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”** (Isaiah 43:25) God buried your sins away with Christ’s death, and in baptism made a promise with you, “Your sins are washed away.” As you step forward to receive his Son’s body and blood with bread and wine, he renews his promise to you, “Your sins are forgiven. You have been saved from my wrath and from hell. You are at peace with me. The wall of sin has been broken down.’

Do you remember where you were in November 1989? I know it’s a long shot, but on November 9, 1989, the German Democratic Republic announced that their citizens could travel without hindrance to the western part of Germany. 2million people showed up to celebrate and tear down the Berlin Wall, because of the oppression of the GDR in eastern Germany, who dictated everything in the lives of their citizens – they determined what kinds of foods they would eat, would style of clothing they could wear, what cars they could drive, where they would live, where they would work. Now, freedom, unity, unification of the German state - the wall had come down.

Jesus has knocked down the wall of your sin. He has forgiven you. And now he asks you to knock down the wall of your hate, anger, rage, and animosity and to forgive and to love. Impossible? Not at all. **The walls of the city will collapse, the commander of the Lord’s army has now come.** The Soldiers of Israel looked at those walls, they marched around them, and they had no choice but to believe the LORD’s command. The writer to the Hebrews said, **“By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.”** (11:30) The attitude of the Israelites echoes Paul’s words in Romans 8, **“Since God is for us, who can be against us?”** Since God is for us, not even those walls and that army can defeat us. Since God is for us, not even Satan or our sinful nature, which would rather sit and stew and rage and hate and not love, they cannot defeat us. Paul continues, **“We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”** Since God is for us, since he fights for us and with us, since he loves us and has forgiven us… the walls of the city will collapse. Amen.