

## **“Stand Still in the Waters”**

Joshua 7:7-8; 14-17 and “Mother is Water” by Suzy Kassem – Poet. Writer. Philosopher.  
May 9, 2021 -- by Rev. Don Ludwig

### **Silver Bridge Tragedy**

Many of you remember the Silver Bridge tragedy in Gallipolis, Ohio. On that fateful day, December 15, 1967, during rush hour, the bridge that connects Ohio and West Virginia collapsed into the Ohio River. Forty six people lost their lives. Since then they have constructed a new bridge which is modern and far superior to the old one. Every year countless people cross the new bridge when they travel South. Most of them are not aware of this tragedy of the past.

I first drove over this bridge many years ago when I was in Seminary. That is when I first learned this story and I must confess, I felt uneasy about traveling over even the new bridge. When you look down as you cross over the bridge all you can see is the swirling, muddy waters of the Ohio River. It was indeed a bridge over troubled waters. At the same time it is a major connecting point for three states, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Route 35 is a major shipping route, a road that connects the North with the South.

### **Ludwig’s Kitchen Fiasco and Other Woes**

Our nation, our church and our lives have experienced many troubled waters over the past couple of years. In the midst of all that we have gone through as a nation and world and as a church, we Ludwig’s have had quite a journey with our kitchen. Our kitchen has been torn up in one way or another for the past 6 months. Our refrigerator conked out last Fall and when we went to replace it, we were told 6 months at the minimum. So we purchased a smaller unit and have been going to the refrigerator in the mudroom ever since.

Still waiting on the refrigerator, we decided to do a small kitchen renovation. We soon discovered that no kitchen renovation is small. About a month ago our plumbing was uninstalled and our stove taken out so our existing countertop could be demolished and a new one installed. After the demolition, we waited on the new countertop for almost one month. That meant we lived for a month without a stove, refrigerator, kitchen sink, water and dishwasher. Troubled waters. No wonder that between Kathy and I, we received three speeding violations in the last six months, all from traffic light cameras. Don’t get me started on the practice of camera traffic lights. Oh the troubled waters of the privileged.

### **Story of Joshua: Faith in God and Community**

The Israelites found themselves in troubled waters when they approached the River Jordan. The Promised Land was on the other side. This was the last major obstacle that stood in their way of reaching their goal. Could Joshua build a bridge over troubled waters? Interestingly, the Lord

told Joshua to “stand still in the waters” of the Jordan. Unlike Moses who raised his staff to part the waters of the Red Sea, Joshua was instructed to wait. Stand still in the waters.

How hard is that for us to do – “to stand still”? When we are experiencing troubled waters we so often lose patience. We want everything now and expect everything to be done yesterday. We want a quick fix. We want the pain, the suffering, the confusion to go away as soon as possible. But crossing troubled waters requires trust and patience. And it also requires faith. Faith in a God and each other to be with us in our transition. Faith in a God who promises new life in a new land. Faith in community who can create a bridge over troubled waters in ways that surpass our understanding.

### **Troubled Waters of our Lives**

It has been truly an honor and privilege to serve in the capacity as Interim pastor over the last year and a half. We have faced many troubled waters together, to be sure. And I know that many of you have faced your own personal trials and tribulations. There are those of you who have traveled the journey of loss – those who have struggled financially or personally – those who have questioned the presence of God – those who are still hurting by what happened with Pastor John – those who have felt isolated and lonely, not knowing what the future holds – those who are struggling with addiction. I am honored to have been trusted by you and invited into your kitchens, if you will, as you have shared with me some of your struggles. I wish there was an easy solution. There is not. But as I told Greg Claussen just yesterday, “growing old ain't for sissies”. Life is tough in so many ways. Certainly, that is true for some more than others.

If I have learned anything the last year and a half, it is to slow down and be in the moment. I have learned to let go of my perfectionism and be more attune to my surroundings and the people around me. I have learned to be patient with myself and others. That has been especially helpful for Kathy's and my traffic violation woes. I have also reflected a lot more than I usually do. Growing up in a dysfunctional family, I will always be thankful for my mother who was the bridge over my troubled waters in so many ways. She was certainly my water – the fire that has given light to the flame in each of my eyes. I would be lost in life without her. Her strength gave me the ability to adapt and allowed me to trust that I could meet whatever challenge before me.

### **The Silver Lining**

The collapse of the Silver Bridge in Gallipolis was a real tragedy and the loss of life was painful. It was the first major loss of a bridge since 1940. Fortunately the event prompted national concern about bridge conditions and led to the establishment of the National Bridge Inspection Standards and the creation of a Special Bridge Replacement Program.

In the Silver Bridge disaster there was a silver lining. A bridge over troubled waters paved the way for all other bridges to be upgraded or replaced. For the Israelites, crossing the Jordan would not be the end of their challenges. Once across they would face opposition in the form of armed nations. They successfully crossed the bridge over troubled waters but their journey was not complete. And neither is ours. What the event did for the Israelites was give them hope and remind them that whatever they faced in the future, God would be with them.

What the events of this past year and a half have done for us, is allowed us to slow down and transition toward a clarified identity and purpose. I would say that Southminster is much more grounded, more open to new ideas even – and more focused on each other than perhaps we were in pre-pandemic days.

So, whatever kitchen renovation or challenge you face today, whatever troubles you have gone through or are currently experiencing, whatever troubles we yet to face as a church, let us remember to always “Stand Still in the Waters”. Wait. Be patient. Know that today paves the way for tomorrow. And trust – trust in God and each other.

And to all of the Mothers among us, thank you, thank you for being the water.

**A-men.**