

What's That For?

Janice just read for us a story about the Israelites crossing the Jordan River. They were coming into the land that was promised to them by God.

Now God told Joshua to do something that may sound strange to us. Go out to the middle of the river and grab 12 stones and put them by the place you camp tonight.

At first glance we might wonder why God wanted 12 stones from the river to be laid on the ground. But it was so that when people see the stones years later, they can be reminded of the story of the Israelites coming into the Promised Land.

I think taking a picture of everyone crossing the Jordan River might have been a little easier than carrying 12 boulders, but they had to work with what they had.

Luckily today we have cameras. I am pretty confident most of us have some personal pictures around our homes. Why do we bother keeping pictures? Well for the most part, they remind us of people we know or have known, people we love, places we've been, memories we have acquired and - they are easier to hang on the wall than a boulder.

But pictures are so important to us. So much so that the most common items grabbed by someone running out of their house during a fire are the pictures on their walls.

Then sometimes we have personal items displayed in our homes and offices that remind us of special occasions or people. For example, in my office I keep this candle. I carried this candle the day I was commissioned as a pastor. When I look at it I remember that ceremony and the Bishop saying some very encouraging words to me about this church

As I looked around my house I saw this clock and I remember a wonderful man by the name of Jim Henson that gave it to me. Jim and I had worked together on several projects and we really formed a wonderful loving and mutually respectful relationship.

We keep pictures and other tokens around our homes to remind us of important people or times. In our church we have similar items and symbols that help us to remember important items as well.

Sometimes during services we may pass something out for you to take home so that when you see it at your home it would hopefully remind you of a particular service that may have touched you.

Other times we may use a symbol that you may only see once or possibly a few times – but it may help you reflect on something very special.

These are all simple reminders that help us focus on something a little deeper. During our church services we also have several items that you see every week, but for some of them - you may have no idea what they stand for, but you're pretty sure that they mean something.

Now over on this wall I printed off a lot of Icons you may see in some Catholic or Orthodox churches. Many people think that the parishioners in these churches are worshipping these icons.

They really aren't. In the churches that keep icons like this up, they are mainly designed to help jog the memory of the parishioner of the sacrifice or good works these particular Saints may have done.

Now we normally don't have a wall covered with icons of Saints in a Methodist Church. We feel it is more important to keep focused solely on God and Christ. But we do use routine symbols in our worship service that are designed to help us focus our thoughts towards God.

However, just like many people think the Orthodox or the Catholic Church worships these icons some other denominations think that we worship some of the symbols we use in our church service and can't believe that we have some of the things that we do use.

Now we obviously don't worship miscellaneous items in our church service, we worship God. The idea of keeping symbols that remind us of other things is very much scriptural. Janice read for us just two of the several passages in the Bible about using symbols to remind us and others of God and his works.

So what is the purpose of the items we routinely use during our worship service?

Let's first look at our candles. Today Janice carried in a candle and we lit the other two candles off of it.

The purpose of all of these symbols is to simply keep us focused on God.

This is also one of the reasons I wear a robe most of the time. I don't want people worrying about my shirt and slacks not matching – I would rather cover myself so you can focus on God more and me less.

Symbols we use at church are meant to be gentle reminders of something else, something bigger and better than us. They are not meant to get in our way of worshiping God, but meant to help us remember God in different ways.

Let's not be afraid to think of these same symbols when we are outside of church.

As we go out beyond these doors and we see the green of the trees, let's remember the Life, Growth and Hope that Jesus gives us –

When we look at a candle and see the flame flicker, let's remember the way the Holy Spirit moves us.

When we sit down to dinner and raise our glass, let's remember Holy Communion and the gift of a new life in Christ.

Pastor: Mark Maddox

520-207-6453

pastor@umcSanctuary.org

www.umcSanctuary.org