

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Reverend Dr. Daris S. Bultena

June 21, 2009

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Joshua 1:1-11

1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying,

2 "My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites.

3 Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses.

4 From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory.

5 No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.

6 Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them.

7 Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go.

8 This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful.

9 I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

10 Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people,

11 "Pass through the camp, and command the people: 'Prepare your provisions; for in three days you are to cross over the Jordan, to go in to take possession of the land that the LORD your God gives you to possess.' "

"Come On Down"

[This weekend has been Vacation Bible School for us, and we have been sharing with children and all present stories of the Bible that call us to "GO!" and do for the Lord. It has been this verse, Joshua 1:9, that has been the gathering point of all that we have learned.]

“I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

“Come on down!” We have all seen enough television and enough game shows to know where those words come from. “Come on down!”

It is an invitation or is it an imperative? Well, you know that is always hard for us. We don’t like anyone to tell us what to do, and we always like to reserve for ourselves the decision if we will do or not do. We are fiercely independent. Yet, whether it is the game show or real life living—it really is way more about living—here it is clearly a command.

The Lord God is speaking directly to Joshua as he is about to lead God’s chosen people into the Promised Land. There are no suggestions here. There are commands. There are imperatives. There are demands. This is not a negotiation.

I want us to hear these imperatives. Consider this—you are not Joshua, and you are not called to lead nations of people into the Promised Land, but you are disciples and you are the baptized who have been called to such a time as this. You are leaders. You are leaders in your community and in your workplace and in your church and in your homes too. God has called you to a leadership role.

There is no special title involved. In your baptism you have been set apart, and by being here this morning there are no accidents—the Holy Spirit has called you to this time and this place.

There is imperative here. You be strong and courageous. You do not be frightened or dismayed. Why? Because the Lord your God is with you.

Be strong. Be courageous.

We tend to meander through and we think that we do not really have what it takes to be strong or that we really do not have what it takes to truly make it. We tend to want to hide behind our places where we feel competent and ignore those places where don't have any experience or we don't have any know-how.

Joshua had never crossed into the Promised Land before. Joshua had never led any people before. Joshua had never faced what he faced before. And yet there is this command. Be strong and courageous.

I want us to hear that not as an invitation from the Lord your God, but as a command. It is not, "why don't you try and be strong and will you please do your best to be courageous." No, it is very clear. "Be strong." "Be courageous."

The reality of is it that God has placed with Joshua and God has placed within us what we need to both be strong and be courageous no matter how immense that which comes along seems. God has given us what we need to be strong and courageous and we are commanded to live into that!

"I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Yes there is an imperative, but there is also the reality that there is work to be done. Why did Joshua need to be strong and courageous? Because they were about to step into the turbulent water. They were about to wade right into the deep of the Promised Land. They were delivered to the shore of the Promised Land but now in order to possess it they were going to have to take it. There was work to be done. There was task at hand.

The same is true of our lives. There is task at hand. God has called us to face that. There is work that needs to be done. There is serving that needs to be accomplished for the reign of God and we have been called to that service.

I think we dream of a life of constant vacation. It is the kind of life that is free of boundaries and obligations where we can just eat, drink, and be merry and all is right with the world. That is not the case. And it never will be in this age. There is sin in this world and there are struggles in our lives and there is much to be done because of it.

We had better step up and pray. We do not pray so that God will take the problems away. We pray so that God will fill us with the strength and courage to face that which we need to face. We pray so that God will give us that confidence to know that we can do whatever we are called to do.

Remember that confidence is not ever a matter of self-confidence; it is a matter of having confidence in God and what God has called us to do and be. Our source of confidence is God and it is God's ability and not our own. That strength of God is poured out upon us and it becomes the equipment for the tasks we face.

As such, the work that needs to be done in our lives—oh, we do not need to shrink in the face of that. We can face it and do it with boldness and confidence in the Lord's ability to work in us.

In our culture we sort of live for the vacation moments when there is nothing to be done and we are not obligated. Ah, there is something to be said for vacations, but always remember that real life is not lived on vacation. It is lived in the trenches of that daily work and struggle to which we are called.

It is in that struggle and in that work that we witness the Promised Land.

“I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

This is an imperative. There is work to be done. And we better get clear on the issue of sin.

Yes, we better get clear on the issue of sin. I tend to emphasize love and not sin. I am convinced that God is all about love and not about sin. I do not know a God that is waiting to zap anyone to hell—I only know a God who welcomes us home and longs for a vital relationship with us.

Where I think it falls apart is not with God’s love. That is always there. It is closer than our next breath. It is nearer than our next thought. That love of God is never in question. It is never in doubt. God loves you—oh God so loves you and takes absolute delight in you. God is like the father who runs to welcome the prodigal home and God is like the mother who cannot forget her nursing child.

God is love. It is the very essence and being of God—it is what God is composed of—love. The problem is not God, the problem is us. The problem is us, and here is the shape of it. What we do all the time is we fall back to the sin of thinking we are alone.

Now preacher, how can it be a sin that we think we are alone? It is in this regard. It essentially becomes the sin of idolatry. God’s commandments, God’s law is clear: “I am the Lord your God, you shall worship only me.”

God's command to Joshua is very clear here too. He will need to not only attend to the law. He will need to not only pay attention to those 10 commandments—he will have to live them and live into them. Were he to not live the law, oh then, it is clear, he will fail to enable Israel to win the Promised Land.

It is what happens with us—we forget the law—we forget the promise. We forget the commandment. And what happens but difficult times come along. There are those moments when the really tough stuff starts to fly towards us. And it can feel like there is someone throwing darts and we are the target.

It can be our life circumstances or our thoughts or all of it together. And in the middle of that we start to think—“here I am stuck and our here alone.” “Here I am.” “I am...alone.”

And we start to spin—“I have to figure this out. I have to solve it. I have to fix it. I'm stuck out here with this now. I'm hung out here to dry all by myself all alone.”

See, what we have really done in that moment is we have made ourselves the center. We have turned the focus onto ourselves. And we so totally forget about God or if we remember God we start to think that God must have forgotten all about us. And we turn it all about us.

In that moment we have become the idol. In that moment when we forget the promise—in that moment sin is real.

**Why? Because—“worship the Lord your God and serve only him.”
Why? Because—“for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”
That promise is more than a stroke of encouragement. It is a promise. It is a seal. It is God wrapping God's presence around you.**

When we forget that promise the sin of making it all about ourselves reigns in our lives. When we claim the promise God reigns in power over all that there is. What does it say? "...with you wherever you go."

Don't stay in your seat—watching life go by. Play. Win. Get in the game. Trust. Believe. Come on down—for the Lord your God is with you. "I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." Amen.