

DO NOT BE DISMAYED October 4, 2015

Communion; Mission Month presentation instead of Unison reading (Lighthouse)

Scripture: Joshua 1:6-9 (9)

Hymns: 1) 495 Called As Partners in Christ's Service 2) 498 Jesu, Jesu 3) 332 As We Gather At Your Table 4) 436 God of Grace and God of Glory

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: Blessed is the one who is always creating the world.

People: Blessed is the one who decrees and fulfills.

L: Blessed is the one who has compassion for all people.

P: Blessed is the one who redeems and saves.

All: Blessed is God! Let us worship.

INVOCATION & LORD'S PRAYER

Holy God, we come to you broken and in need of wholeness. All of us have wounds and fears that remain hidden in our hearts. The world has distorted the goodness you created. Comfort us, and remind us that you are with us wherever we go. Nourish us at your table and send us forth to ministries of compassion and reconciliation. In Jesus' name we pray, "Our Father...."

Joshua 1:6-9

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

THE SERMON

In today's scripture, we find ourselves in the book of Joshua. It may seem odd....our theme is following Jesus, so why this story that took place so long before Jesus' time? But the stories of the Hebrew Bible informed what Jesus did, how he worshiped, and what he said, and in his teachings Jesus built on the experiences that God's people had with their creator before the Incarnation.

Joshua, you may remember, was Moses' right hand man. His story stretches back into the Exodus. We hear what he said and did in the book of Numbers, when the wandering Israelites got to the edge of Canaan, the Promised Land, for the first time. Moses sent a group to spy out the land, to understand the challenges and the benefits of this unknown place. It was a mixed report. A land of milk and honey! Grapes so plentiful it took two men to carry them on a broad beam! But...isn't there always a but?...but there were already people there, who were well settled, and threatening looking. The Israelites started to murmur and talk among themselves that this could not be done. The story of Numbers goes on to say that the spies came back with a very mixed report:

"...saying, 'The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size. There we saw the Nephilim – people who were like giants - and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.'

Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. And all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation said to them, 'Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become booty; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?' So they said to one another, 'Let us choose a captain, and go back to Egypt.'"

But Joshua and Caleb did not go along with that. They said, "The land that we went through as spies is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. Only, do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they are no more than bread for us; their protection is removed from them, and **the Lord is with us; do not fear them.**"

Well! How many times in the Bible are people told that? Don't be afraid. God is with you. Do not listen to your fears. So many times. But they were afraid. Even after all the miracles of the Exodus, and the giving of the Commandments, and the care they received in the desert, the Israelites of this story were so afraid that they didn't go into the new land, and God sent them back to wandering until the faithless generation was replaced by a new generation, their children who might be more willing. Only two would continue on—not even Moses would go

into Canaan from that generation—only Caleb and Joshua, the ones who were not afraid. Who were willing to trust God and not listen to fear.

In this first chapter of the book of Joshua, Moses is gone, the leader is gone, they are back at the border of the Promised Land and Joshua is there to say to the people, don't be afraid; we here, and we are going in. Several thousand years later, Paul would raise the same thought in his letter to the Romans (8:31): "If God is for us, who is against us?"

We are often confronted with this same challenge. We are called, commanded, to follow Jesus. To be a living witness of the gospel, the good news of God's redeeming love shown in Christ. That means that what we do and what we say, not just in worship but in every part of our lives, is always telling and showing the world what it is to be God's people. What joy there is when are filled with the Spirit. What tender care for the world we boldly undertake, for Christ's sake. Our lives and actions demonstrate how grace looks in practice. How perfect love from God drives out our fear.

And we do have fears. So many fears. Ones we push deep inside and try not to remember. Ones that hold us back and hang us up and tell us lies about ourselves, that we are not worthy, we are no good, we must have more than anyone else to matter, that we have to save ourselves.

But those are lies. Our fear lies to us. The truth is, in one way, riskier than listening to those fears: we will have to change. Like the Israelites at the Jordan yet again, this time with Joshua, we will have to decide to walk God's way. To turn a deaf ear to our fears that tell us not to risk and to stay on the far bank of the river. We will have to really, completely, trust God. To believe that if God wills it, God will see it done, using whatever we offer for the task. To take that first step, if not in confidence, then at least in trust that God is with us.

When we start to follow Jesus, when we first get that vision, it's so exciting. It's amazing to think about. We are overcome with love and devotion. It's like the way we feel at Christmas, thinking about that beautiful baby in the manger born for our sakes. But down the road, it gets tougher. There are challenges. The stakes seem higher, and we remember what happened to that little baby when he grew up. Will that happen to us too? Will the forces that do NOT want God's will to be done threaten us, work against us, even kill us??

Maybe they will. None of us can know. Just like Joshua and the Israelites didn't know. They just had to step out. We just have to step out too. We have to stop listening to those voices that say it's too much, you've done enough, there will always be more poor and homeless and hungry people, you can't save them all so why try? Why risk having a broken heart by loving our enemies, when it feels so much more powerful and good to hate them? Why should we go up against all those giants that stand against us?

Because God is leading us there, that's why. Because they are not going to prevail, if you remember the stories of Joshua and David. Because if we are going to follow Jesus, there will be risk...but there will also be reward: closeness with God. The fullness of life that comes when we trust in God and truly care for one another.

Today is world communion Sunday. That means that EVERY CHRISTIAN EVERYWHERE no matter what their usual practice is, is celebrating communion this morning. We take this bread and cup in thanks for what God has done, and what God is doing, and what God will do. We take this bread and cup to remember Jesus, and rededicate our lives to following where he leads us.

And we take it in a spirit of love and confidence. Our communion Table is open; we have no tests, no restrictions, so if you are here, you are welcome to share in this holy feast. Let your faith be your guide. And remember these words, from the apostle Paul:

“What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his only Son but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ... For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

He is waiting for us!

Together with all our brothers and sisters in Christ EVERYWHERE, let us come to the table now.