

For those of you who have persevered through your Year of the Bible readings, I would like to congratulate you on finishing the Pentateuch! That is the Greek Word for the first five books of the Bible. In Hebrew, they're referred to as the Torah, the teachings.

As we move deeper into the historical writings, beginning with Joshua, we'll continue learning how the Hebrew people told the story of settling in the land of Canaan. I can't promise that the readings will get much easier, but we are, at least, done wandering in the wilderness for a while.

But while the wilderness section may have come to its conclusion, the narrative is a continuation of Deuteronomy.

As we read Joshua, don't look at it as a History text book. While it is based on the history of the settling of the Promised Land, it is not, primarily a historical document. The story it tells is at odds with the archaeological record. It is also at odds with the story we'll read in the Book of Judges.

Most scholars believe the Hebrew people settled in the land of Canaan around 1200 BCE. The final text of Joshua, however, was not written until nearly 600 years later. So, imagine being asked to write down an account of the Protestant Reformation of the early 1500's. Some of the details would likely be a little fuzzy, no matter what that time means to you. And your perspective on those events will influence how you tell the story too. If you were a Catholic, you would tell the story with a different perspective. A Catholic boyfriend of mine in college referred to that era of history as "the protestant revolt". I, on the other hand, who considered naming one of my children "Calvin", see it as an important period of growth, reform, and positive change in the church. We would write different stories of the same era.

So it is with the settling of the Promised Land. Joshua was compiled, 600 years after the fact, to preserve the ancient story of life after the wilderness, but it was mainly written to be a document of hope and salvation for people who had lost the Promised Land. By the time Joshua is written down, the people have been carted off to exile in Babylonia after the destruction of the southern Kingdom of Judah in 586 BCE.

*So consider *exile* as you read through Joshua and Judges.*

Yes, it is a violent book. Yes, it has God ordering war, genocide, and violence.

*But the people were devastated by war and conquest and were seeking explanations for *why* they lost their land and ended up in exile. And*

**Strong and Courageous
Aug 30, 2009**

**Joshua 1
Southminster**

**Year of the Bible
Rev. Marci Auld Glass**

what had Deuteronomy said would happen if the people disobeyed?

Listen to these verses from Deuteronomy 28:

But if you will not obey the LORD your God by diligently observing all his commandments and decrees, which I am commanding you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you:

Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field.

Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb, the fruit of your ground, the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock.

Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out.

The LORD will send upon you disaster, panic, and frustration in everything you attempt to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me.

So, in this light, exile was not about God's abandonment of the people. It was God's fulfilling "the covenant obligations for a disobedient people... The Deuteronomistic historian was not urging the Israelites to carry out a new holy war like that described in the book of Joshua. That was no longer even a possibility. What the writer was trying to convey was that God was owed single hearted loyalty." ("Joshua: A journey of Faith" by Mary Mikhael, p. 9) God who had given them the land in the first place was the same God who was going to restore the land to them again, after exile.

Joshua, from whom the book gets its name, is Moses' replacement. His name means "God delivers". You might be more familiar with the Greek version of Joshua's name, Jesus. This is not a book justifying or advocating war and violence. This is a book about the promise and the fulfillment of God's deliverance. Joshua, God delivers.

Thus ends the classroom lecture part of the sermon.

If you are interested in knowing more about the Book of Joshua, I invite you to join in a Presbyterian Women's Circle. The Bible Study this year is on the Book of Joshua, and I will be doing an overview of this book on Wednesday at the PW Gathering, downstairs in the Cana Room.

So, listen now for God's word to us today, from the first chapter of the book of Joshua:

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, "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. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. 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. 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. 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."

Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, "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.'"

To the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh Joshua said, "Remember the word that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, 'The LORD your God is providing you a place of rest, and will give you this land.'

Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land that Moses gave you beyond the Jordan. But all the warriors among you shall cross over armed before your kindred and shall help them, until the LORD gives rest to your kindred as well as to you, and they too take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to your own land and take possession of it, the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you beyond the Jordan to the east."

They answered Joshua: "All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you, as he was with Moses!"

Strong and Courageous
Aug 30, 2009

Joshua 1
Southminster

Year of the Bible
Rev. Marci Auld Glass

Whoever rebels against your orders and disobeys your words, whatever you command, shall be put to death. Only be strong and courageous."

Strong and courageous.

Did you hear those words beating through this text as a drumbeat?

Be strong and courageous.

Strong and courageous.

I confess, most days, to feeling neither strong nor courageous.

But I encounter people every day who are.

Tomorrow, Boise students head back to school. I think some other districts started back this past week. Walking into a new class at the start of a year is exciting, but it also requires strength and courage. Students going off to college and their parents going home to empty houses—strong and courageous.

Job uncertainty or loss requires strength and courage.

Facing medical problems without health insurance.

I have friends who have suffered the death of one of their children. I think that every day they face, every birthday they make it through, they are strong and courageous.

Being with a dear woman as she faced her death with both strength and courage. Saying what she needed to say, even as she realized her opportunities to speak were coming to a close, required strength that I'm not sure she knew she had.

I think that every time you deliver Meals on Wheels, or volunteer with Hospice or at the Hospital, or whatever it is you do to serve, you are strong and courageous, even if you may not feel either. Because you are walking into a new land. Each situation you face is new and unpredictable.

That was the reality for the Israelites as they stood on the mountains of Eastern Jordan, looking down into the Promised Land. And it was the reality they faced in exile. What would the future hold in this new place?

Walking into unknown situations and new lands has a way of stripping away our carefully crafted illusions of control.

*Strong and Courageous
Aug 30, 2009*

*Joshua 1
Southminster*

*Year of the Bible
Rev. Marci Auld Glass*

We like to think that we know what's going on. That we are in control. That we plan out our future and have mapped out our path. But, of course, we don't. We try. Have you heard the joke? Want to make God laugh? Tell God what you'll be doing in 5 years. Moses and the Hebrew people who left Egypt headed to the Promised Land. They knew where they were headed. Should have been a couple of months journey. But not one of them crossed the river. They spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness but it was only the next generations who entered Canaan with Joshua. This was not the way it was supposed to go. Joshua wasn't supposed to lead them across the river. Moses was. This was not the way it was supposed to go. And 600 years later, Babylon wasn't supposed to be able to defeat them and cart them off to exile. This is not the way it was supposed to go.

How often do we say that?

This is not the way it was supposed to go.

But, more often than not, I think we're wrong. I think, often, things do happen the way they were supposed to. They just didn't go the way we had planned.

So, perhaps, this speech is God's way of reminding them about who is in charge.

"As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous; for I shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them."

And maybe being strong and courageous doesn't involve trusting in our own skills and abilities. Perhaps being strong and courageous means trusting God. Letting go of our own needs to control the situation and trusting that it will work out.

I hear this speech that God first gives to Joshua, so Joshua can then give it to the Hebrew people, and I can almost imagine them standing there, looking around at each other and saying, "no, that's okay. You can go first." "No, really. I insist". Perhaps this speech is to force them to take the first step into the future.

The future can be a scary place, even when you're excited about it. Whether it is entering a new Promised Land or facing a terminal illness. Whether it is the first day of school or the first day on unemployment. We encounter new Promised Lands all the time. And I invite you to consider where yours might be today. And how can the words from

***Strong and Courageous
Aug 30, 2009***

***Joshua 1
Southminster***

***Year of the Bible
Rev. Marci Auld Glass***

Joshua 1 speak to your life, and to your situation? Hear God's words to you this day:

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

God is calling you to be bold and courageous in God's provision. To take that first step into your new Promised Land. May the journey not turn out as you planned. May it turn out exactly as it was supposed to go. Amen.