

WELCOME 24th January 2021 – 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany '21 B

Joshua 1:1-11 & 2 Timothy 1:3-10

Welcome! It's great to be together again. Delighted you are here.

As has become our custom there are Group Study & Discussion resources in your hands. *So that for each of us worship is an all week long experience & as God leads you into the fullness of His word & his work in your lives & he will then lead you to someone this week who needs to hear the good news from you.* We are still doing those things we need to maintain a level of safety: Hand sanitizer. Masks. Sign in. No morning tea just yet. Offering. Communion.

As we move into this week... Fear...maybe **THE** most universal human experience...we've all been afraid...but perhaps the least understood. There're all sorts of slogans & motivational sayings & inspirational quotes...many of which make only enough sense to make you **think** they're right...But most of them put the burden for conquering or controlling your fear on you...If you weren't afraid already...

*"Be strong & courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged.
For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."*

Courage is not some superhuman character trait that you should or could create w/in yourself. Courage is a lifestyle that is possible only in relationship w/ the Father. Courage is not the absence of fear but trusting God to keep his promise of presence & power & provision in you. Courage comes from the presence of God w/ us & God will never call us to act where he will not sustain us. God's people live w/ God's commission. We are promised his companionship. We are equipped w/ his word. And we are called to obedience in him. It is from there that courage truly comes.

As individuals & as Christ's Church, we stand on the edge of our own Jordan Rivers that God calls us to cross. The Father promises when we do, the waters will part, dry land will be revealed & his abundance & fullness of life will be given through it all

We're treating this year like the "re-set" button on an electronic device: the "on/off" switch that brings everything back to 0. We're asking God to re-set our lives to his will – our hearts to his way – our path to his purpose – our identity to his people - our direction to his destiny & our courage to his strength.... in every day in every step along the way we are assured:

*"Be strong & courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged.
For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."*

We'll explore & experience that together. Let's pray...then we'll get stuck into it.

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

Gracious Jesus, Light of the World, into the shadows of our isolation you call us into your promises. You call us from individual security to lead us deeply into the world you love. With your mighty hand you redeem the broken places of our lives and you heal the wounded places of the earth. Inspire us who are freed in you and filled to overflowing with your Spirit, to boldly share your love throughout the earth. We pray in your name, Amen

Let's sing & then we'll hear God's Word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. What are some things that cause you to be afraid?
Would you say you handle fear well? If not, why not? If so, how?
2. When someone close to you is afraid...how do you respond?
3. What stops you from acting courageously when it comes to your faith in God? Where in your life do you need more courage?

Prayer after the sermon:

Father we make no pretence to your throne, so have your way in us. Re-set our lives to your will. Re-set our hearts to your way. Re-set our path to your purpose. Re-establish your rule over us as your people. Reorient our hearts to your promised destiny and fill us with courage to obey you in all circumstances so we live out your grace and love to all we know. Through Jesus Christ we pray... Amen.

3 Epiphany '21 B – RE-SET...COURAGE

The first step is always the hardest. Seeking help when life is unmanageable. Taking responsibility for life in freefall. Forgiving someone who wrongs/offends you. Changing direction when life is comfortable. Embracing a relationship when vulnerability is risky. Moving forward when fear paralyzes.

The first step is the hardest. Joshua & the people of Israel knew...The Jordan River was the boundary ^{b/t} the wilderness & the Promised Land. They can't go around it. There are no bridges or tunnels...& like us...1000s of excuses to wait for a better time, look for a better place or go back to Egypt. But **their life** is on the other side if only they have the courage to take the first step & go through the river.

Remember...they've been here ^{b/4}...40 years ago Joshua, Caleb & 10 others spied out the land & brought back this report: "...it is indeed a bountiful country — a land flowing with milk & honey..." But 10 of those spies saw giants. 10 saw fortified walled cities. 10 saw massive armies. 10 saw danger, battle, bloodshed & death. 2, Joshua & Caleb saw victory. 2 saw the hand of God. 2 saw the promise being fulfilled if only they would go. "Let's go at once to take the land...We can certainly conquer it!" 40 years later only those faithful 2 remain of that generation. The rest have died apart from the promise...died in the wilderness...died because their fear overwhelmed their faith...died at the hands of their own fear of death.

Why will things go differently **this** time? How will fear fail & faith flourish? How does God re-set courage for his people not only **this** time but **EVERY** time? We need to see 4 things...^{w/o} these things courage is either unnecessary or absent.

BIBLES...2021 – year of bringing your BIBLE

1st...Courage emerges under commission. If you aren't operating ^{w/} a clear command of God you don't have courage...you may have bravado or arrogance or cockiness or superior firepower...Courage does not exist apart from God's call & command. *After the death of Moses...the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun...He said, "Moses my servant is dead. Therefore, the time has come for you to lead these people, the Israelites, across the Jordan River into the land I am giving them. Joshua's clear call is to get 'em across the river & be ready to receive the land as a gift...yes, they will fight battles to receive that gift, but 1st...the commission. Courage only exists toward some purpose...some goal. Courage isn't like a block of cheese you can just go get. It isn't some mystical force that some have & others don't. A lot of what looks like courage is something else entirely. Courage is supposed to take you some place & the place it takes you is the place where God has called you. No call = No courage.*

Jesus came & told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven & on earth. Therefore, go & make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father & the Son & the Holy Spirit. Teach these disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. Oh look...we have a call. We exist under a commission. Joshua has 1 responsibility: lead God's people across the Jordan River to receive the blessing of land God promised to Abraham. Their life their blessing their future their destiny is only accessible under the direction of that commission/call. Courage rises when you have confidence in the call & faith in the One who calls you.

How y'all doin' ^{w/} your call? How's your commission goin'? What stops you from acting courageously when it comes to your faith in God? Courage rises when you have confidence in the call & faith in the One who calls you. *When I left for Macedonia, I urged you to stay there in Ephesus & stop those whose teaching is contrary to the truth. Don't let them waste their time in endless discussion of myths & spiritual pedigrees. These things only lead to meaningless speculations, which don't help people live a life of faith in God...This is a trustworthy saying, & everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" & I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize they, too, can believe in him & receive eternal life. – 1 Tim 1:3-4, 15-16* That's Timothy's call...put an end to useless speculative teaching that is disconnected from Jesus & helps no one...AND point to the one thing that is true: God comes to us personally & rescues, recreates, & reunites all things through the life, death, resurrection & rule of Jesus Christ. What God planned & promised from the beginning is fulfilled in Jesus & will reach its completion when Christ returns to reign forever. Teach that! Paul says. That's your commission/call. Courage rises when you have confidence in the call & faith in the One who calls you. Courage emerges under commission.

2nd...Courage exists with God as Companion *I promise you what I promised Moses: 'Wherever you set foot, you will be on land I have given you. From the Negev wilderness in the south to the Lebanon mountains in the north, from the Euphrates River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west, including all the land of the Hittites.' No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. For I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail you or abandon you. "Be strong & courageous, for you are the one who will lead these people to possess all the land I swore to their ancestors I would give them..."*

God has called Joshua in keeping an age-old promise. Do you think God's going to quit on him now that it's **GO TIME**? Since God has called you, he is ^{w/} you. Courage doesn't mean I am not afraid. It means I trust God more than I fear my circumstance. It means that I trust *HIS* divine presence & provision more than I fear my lack. God does not call the capable **he accompanies the called**...and that is enough.

3rd...Courage grows from God's Word. **Be strong & very courageous.** *Be careful to obey all the instructions Moses gave you. Do not deviate from them, turning either to the right or to the left. Then you will be successful in everything you do. Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day & night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper & succeed in all you do.* This is my command—**be strong & courageous!** Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." **NB:** *strong/courageous* brackets the command to hang deep in God's Word...God's Word is the hub holding the wheel in place. We like music in our house. Every now & then the girls will have something on so loud they can't hear Leonie or me call them. So we remind them that if the background noise is too loud you can't hear what you're supposed to hear. Fear is background noise. God's Word is what you are supposed to hear.

When the background noise of your life roars & blares & drowns out all other sound, sometimes the thing we lose in our hearing is God's Word...sometimes the background noise is so overpowering we stop hearing the Voice that assures us we will not be overthrown: *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, & they follow me. I give them eternal life, & they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, & he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. The Father & I are one.*" – *Jn 10:27-30* "50 Biblical Promises" bookmark...more than 50...2021 – year of bringing your BIBLE. *Courage grows from God's Word...and nowhere else. The Lord himself watches over you! The Lord stands beside you as your protective shade. The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon at night. The Lord keeps you from all harm & watches over your life. The Lord keeps watch over you as you come & go, both now & forever.* – *Ps 121:5-8*

4th...Courage is for obedience...You aren't courageous if you aren't doing what God has called you to do. You might be doing great things...but if God hasn't called you there...you aren't operating courageously. *Joshua then commanded the officers of Israel, "Go through the camp & tell the people to get their provisions ready. In three days you will cross the Jordan River & take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you."* Courage is supposed to take you some place & the place it takes you is the place where God has called you. If you're not going there...you don't need courage.

Jonah is called by God to go to Nineveh. He heads for Tarshish. Then when the storm hits the fan he hides in the hold of the ship. So far: no obedience, no courage. But when he realizes he cannot escape his call to Nineveh, Jonah does the first courageous thing in his life. He tells the other sailors (whose lives his disobedience has put in jeopardy...disobedience always has a price to you & others) chuck me overboard & you'll be ok & the storm stops & the big fish...& finally Jonah obeys.

Courage is for obedience...You do not need courage & you will not have courage if you are not obedient to God. ^{w/in} days of crossing the Jordan & conquering the city of Jericho, these same Israelites attack a city (Ai) under their own strength & strategy & get their backsides handed to them. Why? *Israel violated the instructions about the things set apart for the Lord...Achan had stolen some of these dedicated things, so the Lord was very angry with the Israelites.* *Jos 7:1* Everything in the city of Jericho was to be destroyed as an offering to God...Achan found some loot he liked & kept it for himself & then the Israelites got overconfident & attacked Ai half-heartedly, were defeated & chased off...lots of bodies left behind them. You do not need courage & you will not have courage if you are not obedient to God. Why? Because whatever you do is going to go to ruin eventually. 'gain the whole world & forfeit your soul'

In fact...it is often the case that you will not know **HOW** God is going to act **UNTIL YOU** get your feet wet or your hands dirty in obedience. *The Lord told Joshua, "Today I will begin to make you a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites. They will know that I am with you, just as I was with Moses. Give this command to the priests who carry the Ark of the Covenant: "When you reach the banks of the Jordan River, **take a few steps into the river & stop there.**"...The priests will carry the Ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth. **As soon as their feet touch the water,** the flow of water will be cut off upstream, & the river will stand up like a wall."* – *Jos 3:7 & 13* Courage is for obedience & like a muscle courage is strengthened as it is exercised in obedience.

Sometimes you have to say "no" to that thing that is destroying you ^{b/4} you experience God's deliverance from that thing...no to the addiction no to the compulsion no to the bitterness - to the grudge - to the anger...It is often the case that you will not know **HOW** God is going to act **UNTIL YOU** get your feet wet or your hands dirty in obedience...until you are standing up to your ankles in the river.

How y'all doin' ^{w/} your call? How's your commission goin'? What stops you from acting courageously when it comes to your faith in God? *This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. For God has not given us a spirit of fear & timidity, but of power, love, & self-discipline.* I suspect Timothy needed reminding like we need reminding that Courage is not some superhuman character trait we can create ^{w/in} ourselves. Courage is a lifestyle that is possible only in relationship ^{w/} the Father. Courage is not the absence of fear but trusting God to keep his promise of presence & power & provision in us. Courage comes from the presence of God ^{w/} us & God will never call us to act where he will not sustain us. As God's people we live ^{w/} God's commission. We are promised his companionship. We are equipped ^{w/} his word. And we are called to obedience in him. *"Be strong & courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."* **Let's pray ^{w/} that in mind... (prayer on first page)**