

From Joshua to Jesus:

A Lenten devotional

By

Pastor Lee and Pastor Reid

February 17

Today, the journey begins. An odyssey, if you will. Or, in a strangely similar thought, the Godyssey begins. We walk the Lenten path again. For two thousand years it has been trod by Christians, devout people longing for the Spirit of the living God to enter again. Lent is a time of preparation and sacrifice; it is a time of reflection and trust.

This year our perspective is sharpened on two figures of our holy book: Joshua and Jesus. At first blush we might think that these two had very little in common. They were born millennia apart. Joshua born a slave, Jesus the son of an unmarried carpenter and his teenage fiancé. Joshua a fighting man, Jesus the opposite. But these two men had much more in common than we might realize. Ultimately, the journey from Joshua to Jesus is a path filled unexpected surprises.

Follow with us, Pastor Lee and I, as we travel through the book of Joshua to find some of the great questions of life in the pages of Joshua – the sixth book of the Bible. Joshua, to the rabbi's was considered in many ways as important as the Torah – the books of law – the first five books of the bible. Some scholars called Joshua part of the Hexateuch¹- the first six books.

Needless to say, Joshua is written in historical narrative prose. Joshua is like a history book, though many scholars would say it is not always factually correct, it *is* a theological masterpiece built on a Hebrew pillar of faith that obedience leads to blessing. In the case of the book of Joshua, the obedience that had been lacking in the wilderness leads to the eventual fulfillment of promise of the nation/land of Israel.

This Godyssey is six weeks. Each day we will look at a specific scripture in Joshua and how it moves us to thinking about our trip once again to the foot of the cross. Not everyday will we be writing about Jesus, but as Luther said, "The bible is the cradle of Christ."²

In the Hebrew language, the names Joshua and Jesus are the same: *yehoshua* – God saves.

This Lent, walk with us to find God's saving act...

From Joshua to Yeshua.

¹ From the Jewish Study Bible. Some scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries thought that Joshua should have been included in the Torah because of Joshua's mirror imaging of Moses' leadership.

² From Luther's preface to the Old Testament.

“Large Shoes”
February 18, 2010

Most people have never heard of Sister Nirmala. From relatively humble beginnings, born the daughter of Hindu parents, Sister Narmala was Hindu for the first twenty-four years of her life. Then, she converted to Catholicism when a nun entered her village. Sister Nirmala has a degree in political science with additional study in law. She will probably never be known as much as her predecessor – Mother Teresa.

The whole world knows of the saintliness and love of that wonderful woman who died on the same day that Princess Diana did. Mother Teresa stood for the oppressed, the sick, the outcast – the Unfortunates – when no one else would. Mother Teresa was known worldwide and in many ways, she was a symbol of thoughtful, loving Christianity throughout the world.

Imagine following in her footsteps like Sister Nirmala had to.

But, Sister Nirmala doesn't have to Mother Teresa. She can only be herself; she can only be guided to use her own God-given gifts to bless others in this world. It would probably do her no good to compare herself to Mother Teresa, but others will do it for her.

So it is with Joshua. Of course, Joshua was known relatively well throughout the Israelite circles. He was in many ways Moses' right hand man. When Moses descended Mount Sinai, Joshua met him on the way down (Exodus 32:15-19). Joshua was one of the 12 spies sent into Canaan – only he and Caleb brought back a promising report. (Numbers 14:6-9)

But he was not Moses and the people of Israel knew it. After Moses' death, as Joshua stood facing people, he knew he was already being compared to his predecessor. Every move that he would make would be weighed against the acts of Moses and it was likely that Joshua felt a great sense of imposing weight on his shoulders. When Moses died, Joshua had 30 days to prepare for the task of leading this stiff-necked people into a foreign land, all the while knowing that the people would be saying, “Joshua is good, but he's no Moses.”

What is a time in your life when you've had to take a role of leadership? How did that work out for you?

Have there ever been any times in your life when you are compared, fairly or unfairly, to someone else?

Have you ever tried to fill some big shoes? What happened?

How is God calling you to be a leader? How is God calling you to be a follower?

Who are some people in your life that inspire you to serve others? How and why?

“Establishing Boundaries”
February 19
Joshua 1:3,4

I loved attending elementary school. The building itself was a non-imposing, two storey light brick structure that sat on the east edge of Rake Iowa. There was one classroom for each grade except for the fourth and fifth grades that shared a room. The 4th/5th grade room had windows that overlooked the playground. It was quite distracting on warm spring mornings to see the vast expanse of grass that was calling all the boys and girls to an enterprising game of flag football.

The whole of the upper elementary boys had to play if we wanted to have a game. I remember the first time, as a fourth grader, I was invited to take part. As one of the lower elementary students, our main task was to block for the 6th graders, but every once in a while the quarterback would throw us a bone and let us go out for a pass. Kenton Hove was the quarterback most times. He was always chosen first – to be quarterback – because he was the tallest: the only kid over five feet tall.

We had played for a while when Kenton called all of us back to the huddle. Drawing the play on his hand, he called all of the older boys by name giving them their assignments. And then, Kenton turned toward me. “Reid, go out the left side. I’m going to throw the ball to you. Catch it and run as fast as you can. They won’t be expecting it.”

I was excited. The thought of catching the ball was cause for joy, but then running with it? Come on – that would be like heaven. Kenton shouted “Hike” and the ball came back to him. He faked right and then softly tossed the ball to me. I can still see it in slow motion tumbling end over end into my arms. Surprisingly, I caught and turned to run. What I hadn’t expected was that Eugene Aukes was waiting for me. I didn’t want to get touched. I didn’t want to let the team down so I ran as fast as I could: Straight into the cornfield away from Eugene.

Kenton called time out. Everyone started laughing. I brought the ball back and placed it in Kenton’s hands. “Where were you going?” he asked. “You told me to run,” I said. “The trees are the boundaries. You have to stay on the field or your out of bounds. Play is over.”

Kenton didn’t throw the ball to me again until I was in seventh grade.

We all need to know the boundaries.

In the first chapter of Joshua, God delineates the physical boundaries for the people of Israel. They are not going to conquer the world; they will not know world dominion. They will simply take hold of the promise – the promise of land. We will find later that God desires boundaries for every part of the Israelites life. The commandments are a set a boundaries that keep the Israelites safe. Joshua reminds the people that the Book shall not depart from their boundaries of their hearts. God desires that the people be safe physically, emotionally and spiritually. God sets the Israelites apart so that they might be a blessing to the world. God sets the boundaries for the people’s own good.

What boundaries are in your life?

What is helpful about boundaries?

What is a time in your life when boundaries seemed constrictive?

How does God set the boundaries in your life?

Why doesn't God give the Israelites the whole world if they are the chosen people?

“Strong and Courageous”
Joshua 1:6,7,9,18

February 20, 2010

“Be Brave!” We may have heard that small phrase from our parents once or twice whether a trip to the doctor or a knock at the door when the tooth fairy is about to arrive. It is a call to take heart and don’t fear. In a short amount of time, all will be better.

Just hearing the words doesn’t take away the fear, though.

We notice in the first chapter of Joshua God speaks to Joshua four times – Be strong and courageous. Isn’t God being redundant? Okay, we get it – strong and courageous – I got it. Why is this phrase repeated so often?

I believe that it stems from the very psyche of the Israelites. They had been slaves for so long that they knew nothing but how to act like a slave. They knew only fear of punishment. There was no such thing as reward and hope itself was only a pipe dream. Slaves operate under the assumption that they are locked into a never ending spiral of fear. If I stand up, I will be beaten down. If I speak out, I will be quieted.

At the beginning of the book of Joshua, they are on the cusp of entering a promise they had only dreamed of. But they had to be reminded to be strong and courageous. Moses had never needed that kind of encouragement. He had been second in command of Egypt; he operated under a different set of life experiences. He alone of the elders of the Israelites had never been a slave. And now they had had forty years of wandering in the wilderness to deal with and purge their slave-like tendencies.

But, we can never really escape the fear of reprisal. We can never escape the fear that someone is watching our inadequacies and waiting for the hammer to fall for payment of our sins. Be strong and courageous!

But thanks be to God that you having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness!

Romans 6:17,18

What things enslave you? What causes you fear?

What things keep us in fear? What Wilderness experience has brought us through to freedom learning strength and courage?

What does it mean that we were a slave to sin and now a slave of righteousness?

How does this give us hope?

For further reading: Romans 6: 19-23

“Strength”
February 21, 2010

Mark McGwire. It’s immediate, isn’t it? Now when we read that name or hear it in conversation only one word comes to mind: steroids. Throughout his life McGwire was known for hitting home runs; his prodigious forearms were built to hit the ball a long ways. Even McGwire himself said in an interview for MLB.com, “I was given this gift by the man upstairs.”

I don’t think God’s gift to Mark McGwire was steroids, not even for ‘health reasons.’

God’s gift of strength comes in a very different form. The Israelites longed for courage and strength – to believe in the God that led them from captivity, through the desert, drawing near to the promised. They so much wanted the reality of a living God ever present in times of trouble. But strength comes and goes. Where does it come from?

Psalm 46:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

God is strength and courage; the Israelites gained strength and wisdom from His presence and from the word. Hear God’s words in Joshua 1:7,8

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 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 mediate on it day and night.

It is not surprising that the Israelites are inspired by the Word of God. How often are we, as Christians, inspired by a turn of phrase in scripture that gives us strength in a most unexpected time? On this Sunday, read through the fullness of Psalm 46. Meditate on the beauty of this passage. Bring forth the encouraging words of God’s servant David and find strength.

Where do you find strength?

What are your weaknesses?

Read 2 Cor. 12: 8-10 What does this mean?

“Living in the Walls”
February 22, 2010

I’ve heard it before; I’ve said it myself: “God can’t use someone like me. I’m too _____ (fill in the blank).” The more times we say it, the easier it becomes for us to believe it, that we are unworthy and that God can do His will without us (or with someone a bit more qualified.)

A young African American girl, living in the south was raped at the age of nine. At fourteen her first child died at birth. In high school, the girl attached herself to a local radio station and then at age nineteen, found herself co-anchoring a local TV newscast. Soon after, the young woman was plucked out of relative obscurity and now is one of the most influential women in the world. Can you guess who it is?

Oprah Winfrey.

I’m not saying that God had in mind some of those terrible things to happen to Oprah Winfrey, but what I would say is that perhaps very few people who knew Oprah during her formative years would have guessed that her current wealth would be approximated at 2.7 billion dollars.

I would also guess that those people who knew the prostitute Rahab would not have guessed that she would end up being open to helping another nation overrun her country. Perhaps the Israelites, the ones she helped, would never in a million years assumed that Rahab, a prostitute living in the walls of Jericho would be a great, great grandmother of King David. Perhaps Christians would be welcome to the understanding that an ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ was a person some would call unworthy.

But it is in the very essence of God to call people who would seem unworthy by human standards. All throughout the scriptures it never seems like the ‘worthy’ ones are called first. Look at this list: Gideon – one of the greatest judges of Israel (youngest in his family, which, by Israelite standards, is the lowest of positions); Ruth – Moabite (foreigners were no-nos); King David – youngest and most headstrong; Joseph – second to Pharaoh alone (second youngest and not really known for his humility); and lastly, Moses himself – orphaned at birth, the youngest of a slave family, stutterer and not known for a supreme amount of confidence. The list could go on and on.

Each in this list had the opportunity to hide behind the walls that life can produce. They could have said, “God doesn’t need me; I’m not worthy. I’m too _____” But each was willing to tear down the walls between their own feelings of unworthiness and God’s willingness to use all people for miraculous things.

What are your own walls that keep you from seeking God’s will in your life?

Why are we fearful?

Who are some people in your life that you can name who seem to have come out of nowhere to be used by God?

How do we tear down the spiritual walls in which we live?

Be Prepared **February 23, 2010**

- **Be Prepared in Mind** by having disciplined yourself to be obedient to every order, and also by having thought out beforehand any accident or situation that might occur, so that you know the right thing to do at the right moment, and are willing to do it.
- **Be Prepared in Body** by making yourself strong and active and able to do the right thing at the right moment, and do it.

Some of you might recognize these to bullet points from the Boy Scout motto. As a Scout, one is called to recognize the situation, be ready for action and then to prepared enough to follow through regardless of the consequences.

I wonder if Rahab was a Girl Scout.

Some spies from another land were sent to Jericho to seek the odds of conquering the land. Rahab had already recognized the situation. In Joshua 2, the spies come to Rahab's 'hole in the wall' and seek refuge. She sizes up the proceedings, takes them immediately to the roof, hides them and then prepares for the coming of the king's men. Why would she do this? Doesn't she know that she would be seen as a traitor?

Rahab was prepared for the inevitable; in order for her life and for her family to continue, she recognized that a new force was on the doorstep. In verse 9 she says to the spies before they go to sleep, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you." She has her finger on the pulse of the nation. By hiding the spies, she brings danger to herself, but she is prepared to make the next step. All that she needs to do, as a reminder of the promise, is to hang a crimson cord outside her window.

No problem. But Rahab doesn't wait for a few days; immediately, after the spies leave, she ties the cord to the window. There's no telling when the spies will return – she doesn't wait to avoid suspicion. She simply acts and even after almost a week of no return, the crimson cord hangs as a visible reminder of the hope that her life will be spared.

In many ways, the splash of crimson that we connect to is Jesus' body and blood. The blood is a reminder of the hope of his coming but we don't wait to cling to the crimson cord, we prepare ourselves for his return. In a place where all can see, we show our future hope in Yeshua – God who saves.

1. Read through 1 Peter 1:3-13. What does it mean to prepare your minds for action?
2. Most of the people of Jericho would see Rahab as a traitor – one worthy of death, yet the Israelites see her as a heroine of faith. Which is right?
3. In the genealogy of Jesus, Rahab takes a prominent place? (Matthew 1:5) What does this mean? How does this affect our view of this prostitute?
4. How are you preparing for Easter?