

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

February 26, 2017

## **“(Not) Strong Enough”**

*Whom Shall I Fear? part 3*

Joshua 1:1-11

You are in the right place this morning. It is no accident that you are in this worship service. God has a purpose for you, and if you pay attention, you will discover it. If you take a look around you, you see people from all walks of life who have decided on one thing: we are going to worship Jesus Christ, together. I thank you for your presence this morning. It honors God, and it is a gift to me.

Would you pray with me? God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, we turn to you this morning with the expectancy of a small child looking to her parent. Sometimes we are afraid, unsure, and unclear what it is you are asking us to do. But we long to hear from you. So give us clean hands, pure hearts, and open minds this morning, as we study your Word together. Move us as you will, Heavenly Father. Through your Holy Spirit, we give you all the honor and praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Time for a pop quiz. We have spent the last three weeks focusing on overcoming fear. To that effect, we've been using Psalm 27:1 as our memory verse. Do you know it? Let's say it together.

Psalm 27:1 “The LORD is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear?  
The LORD is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid?”

Knowing God's Word is always a good way to overcome fear. The past few Sundays, we've been naming our fears. We've talked about fears from sickness, failure, and threats to our family. We've talked about transitions in governments

and fears related to our finances and security. You might remember I mentioned that I have a fear of letting someone down who relies on me.

Today I want to ask, how many of you have a fear of moving? Not moving your arms and legs....I'm talking about getting a new job, buying a new house, and learning new names at the office. Those are pretty intimidating. Before I was appointed here, I moved with my family to Indian River. There was some anxiety associated with this move. Part of it was providing for my family, and wondering how we could afford a new house. But another part of my fear was fitting in at the new church and learning how to do my job, which was a brand new position. After talking to a few people, I realized that I was entering a church after a dearly-loved pastor had left after 12 years, and he was the only male on staff. So when I showed up, I wondered if there was some expectation that I was going to have to fill his shoes. Even though I wasn't the pastor!

Do you remember your first day in a new job, maybe even your very first job? How did you feel? Did you have people looking up to you, expecting you to know what to do? If you are just flipping burgers, maybe the expectations aren't that strong. But if you work in a position where many people are relying on you – as a manager, CEO, team leader, president, or even a pastor! – the weight of leadership can be very heavy indeed.

Even if you've never worked a day in your life, I'll bet there was a time when someone was relying on you. Have you ever held a newborn baby? Your first child? Did you wonder, "What am I getting myself into? Am I going to be strong enough?"

I bet 99% of us have had those thoughts, and to the 1% of you who have not: someday, you will. And that's why I chose the scripture about Joshua this

morning. If anyone had heavy expectation on his shoulders, it was Joshua, and the way he responded to his fears is a great example to us all.

You might have heard a thing or two about Joshua. He was an Israelite who came out of Egypt with Moses during the great Exodus. Joshua was a witness to the parting of the Red Sea. He was Moses' right-hand man. Together they went up Mt. Sinai for the giving of the Ten Commandments. Joshua saw some really great stuff.

Joshua was there to hear Moses' farewell speech – recorded in the book of Deuteronomy. Moses gave all of Israel a pep talk – they were going into the Promised Land. And he concluded with this phrase: “Be strong and courageous.” (Deut 31:6) Then he turned to Joshua and promoted him.

That phrase, “Be strong and courageous” is found eleven times in the Bible – all in the Old Testament, and six times Joshua is the recipient of that command. Moses told him, then God told him several times, and even Joshua's own people told him to be strong and courageous.

Question – when is it necessary to tell someone to be strong and courageous? When do you have to tell someone, “Be brave”? Usually, when they are not feeling that way!

When Moses left Joshua in charge, Moses didn't give Joshua a lot of direction. In fact, imagine just for a moment that Joshua was having an interview with the rest of the Hebrews for the now-open “CEO of Israel” following Moses' death.

*“So, Joshua, tell us a little about your qualifications.”*

*“Well, I was one of only two spies who brought back a good report from the Promised Land. Caleb and I, we were the only ones who believed God's promises.”*

*“That’s great! So, what happened?”*

*“Well, no one else believed us, so God told the Israelites to go back to the desert. That’s when I started following Moses around.”*

*“Oh, Moses! He was a great leader! I bet you learned all sort of things from him.”*

*“Well, actually...”*

*“How long did you study under Moses?”*

*“Forty years.”*

*“Wow. What do you learn?”*

*“Mostly, how to wander.”*

*“I’m sorry...?”*

*“Wander. As in, get lost. We wandered for forty years.”*

*“I see...”*

I did a little checking on Google Maps. Cairo, Egypt, to Jerusalem, is about a 10 hour drive, if you get through customs OK. It’s a whopping 500 miles. I’m no math major, but that means Moses and Joshua covered an average of 13 miles each year. By comparison, if Joseph, Mary and Jesus had taken that long to go to Egypt and come back, Jesus would have been 80 years old by the time he started his ministry!

To call Joshua a little unprepared is the understatement of the week. Moses gave him an associate’s degree in desert wandering that took forty years to earn. And now, Joshua was supposed to lead the country. Great.

Joshua did not have much to go on, only the commands that God had given him: “Be strong and courageous. Go in, take the land. Obey my law. Get the

people ready.” God gave Joshua precious few details, and Joshua had some very big shoes to fill.

But what Joshua did next is an example to us all. Joshua did not go to the leaders and say, “Listen, guys. God wants us to cross the Jordan River, and I know it’s flooded, and Moses never really taught me anything about leading, I just know wandering, so let’s put this whole Promised Land thing to a vote. What do you say?”

No, look at the scripture. Joshua 1:10-11. <sup>10</sup>“So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: <sup>11</sup>“Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.’”

Joshua believed the promises God gave him, the same promises God gave to Abraham and Jacob. Joshua went to the leaders and said, “Get ready. We’re going swimming.”

It takes a lot of guts to face your fears. It takes a lot of guts to be a leader, in the face of uncertainty, and say, “This is the direction we are going.” I read a book by Pastor Andy Stanley that challenged me as a leader. Andy pointed out that each leader needs to know their “uncertainty threshold.” He says, “As a leader, it’s OK to be uncertain. It’s not OK to be unclear.” Joshua was clear – “We are going across the Jordan.” He didn’t know how the waters would stop. He didn’t know how he was going to win all these battles against Jericho and the other people of the land. But he knew that he would be obedient. Being strong didn’t mean Joshua had muscles. It meant he had faith.

I admit, I don’t know that I am as brave as Joshua. I happen to like certainty. In the face of the unknown, I tend to be timid. I’m not sure what’s

going to happen. But then I remember that God has not abandoned me yet, and I don't think he ever will. So I can act as a leader to the best of my abilities. It doesn't matter how strong I am. On my own, I'm not strong enough to take the Promised Land. But God is strong enough. So I need to be obedient.

The Bible has a pretty clear formula. Obeying God equals success. Disobeying God equals failure. As a father, leader, and pastor, that's what I'm going to base my life on. Not how strong I am; how obedient I am to God.

My question for you is, what Promised Land is God asking you to go in and take possession of? What's on the other side of the river for you? Is it your integrity? Is it a godly family? Do the people in your community know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? Do they have hope? Do we need to claim our schools, claim our village, and claim our country? Do we need to claim our marriages for Jesus?

Maybe there isn't a lot of direction. Maybe the way is uncertain. But we can be clear. God has given us the authority to march in. God is willing to give us victory. The question is, will he find us obedient?

As God's church, we have the authority from the Holy Spirit to pray, teach, encourage, challenge, admonish, and love. This is how we enter our Promised Land. It takes every single one of us to make disciples of Jesus Christ and transform the world. It takes Sunday School teachers, nursery volunteers, communion stewards, choir members, video technicians. It takes people visiting nursing homes and shut-ins, tutoring our children, and being godly examples. It takes turning the other cheek, not complaining when things don't go our way, believing that God is going to do a new work among us, not being afraid to try, not being afraid to lead.

This is God's church. Not yours. Not mine. God expects us to do the best that we can, and trust his promises. I don't know what's on the other side of the river. But we're going in, because God said take possession of the land. Will you go with me?

I invite you take spend a few minutes in reflection as the video, "Strong Enough" by Matthew West is shown on the screen.

### Memory verse

Psalm 27:1 - "The LORD is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid?"

### Reflection questions

1. How do you feel when the mantle of leadership is placed on your shoulders? Excited? Honored? Scared?
2. What "Promised Land" does God want you to possess? Is it your family, your church, your workplace, your school? Something else?
3. What do you believe God wants for our church? Why do you believe this? Are you willing to work to make it happen?
4. Have you claimed God's promises for yourself? Are you strong and courageous, or meek and quiet?