

Today's Bible character is Joshua, successor to Israel's prime mover and shaker, Moses. Joshua, the one who led the people into the Promised Land. Joshua, the one not afraid to trust the word of a prostitute, who was working for good. Joshua, who re-establishes the Israelites' covenant with God, saying choose this day whom you will serve but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Joshua, who listened to the word of God and obeyed, like Hannah and Samuel, like Elijah and Elisha. Once again, the disclaimer, these were violent days. When you read or discuss the violent parts, remember that these stories come from an oppressed, small group of courageous people, who were trying to establish themselves against many foes seeking to kill them. Their stories continued to be passed down and refined as they became refugees and slave, exiled in the land of Babylon. While feeling weak and subdued, they remember their leader Joshua, the one whose name means God saves. Joshua, the strong and courageous!

Joshua 1:1-9

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, ² "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. ³ Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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."
(NRS)

Winston Churchill said, "Success is not final. Failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts." E.E. Cummings said, "It takes courage to show up and become who you really are." Brene Brown says in her TED talk that courage is not the same as bravery. She explains that courage is about taking your whole heart to the task, being willing to be vulnerable. Brene Brown's talk on the power of vulnerability is in the top five viewed TED talks ever! As a storytelling researcher, she talks about the thing that helps people to make it through the challenges of life - connection, a sense of belonging or worthiness. And in her research what she discovered is that the people who have an innate sense of worthiness have a strong sense of connection, compassion for self and others, and are those who have the courage to show up with all their vulnerability without being overcome by fear of shame.

Shame we been told is the shadow side of guilt. Guilt is good because it says I did something bad. Shame is harmful because it says, "I am a bad person, not worthy of anyone's love." Shame is what leads people to the indignity of hating self or others. But God is love, and God loves you and want to give reassurance so you can be strong and courageous, instead of fearful and ashamed. Paul says to the Corinthians that God's strength is made perfect in weakness.

To be fearful and ashamed leads you to believe that there are only two positions to be in - attacker or attackee. This was true in Joshua's day and still is true today. I think God actually had a greater plan for Joshua than the one Joshua followed, and I think that's true for my life too, but God takes our broken lives and uses them to bring about good. The foes of Joshua day and our day may be different, but the same lines in the sand get drawn, and while the story of God's people is sometimes violent and we wish that were not so, it does seem to me that God is always trying to lead us to a healthier place of being a blessing to one another,

as we saw in the person of Jesus Christ. Yet even he, Jesus, in his supreme goodness got misunderstood and accused, but he did not allow that brutality to change him, to turn him from his attitude of love.

Courage is believing that God is proud of you, and yet not finished with you yet. You are amazing and a piece of work. So be strong and courageous - let that work be done, through the people who have advice you don't want to hear, from the people who get on your last nerve, most likely because they remind you of something you don't like in yourself. Have courage to be the you that you really are, because you know that pretending to be someone else leaves you feeling worse, because it's too much work to keep hiding.

Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak. Declare your truth kindly and firmly, whether people like it or not. Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen, because your truth is not the only truth that matters. Yes, you are so very valuable and need to be heard, but so does that neighbor on your street and that person sitting near you in church. It is not all about you. You did not just come today to get your needs met. Courageous people are seeking to help others. And courage does not always roar. Sometimes it is the quiet voice at the end of the day that says I will try again tomorrow. (Mary Ann Radmacher) Remember the quiet voice of God last week in the story of Elijah?

It takes courage to stand up and speak for those who are being ridiculed. "Real men might be made fun of" is the title of an op-ed piece by Lindy West that spoke to me this week. Real men and women and children speak up when others make demeaning jokes about women or LGBT people or people with disabilities or people of color or people of other faiths. It takes real courage to say, "I don't appreciate that comment" or to find a gentle way to challenge the coach who tries to motivate his football players by telling them they are playing like girls. Because language shapes reality, and for too long we have let that kind of damaging talk persist, and it continues to shape a reality in which women are undervalued, underpaid, and one in four sexually abused.

But challenging the norms takes courage, because then you are subjecting yourself to ridicule, to being called the moral police or obsessed with political correctness or the killjoy of the party when you say you don't

appreciate that attitude or comment. Some people still justify the mistreatment of people by quoting the Bible, but they have not paid much attention to the loving example of Jesus when they do that.

It also takes great courage to turn a conversation that is maligning the very character of a political figure back to a discussion of policies and issues. It is easy to laugh with those making jokes, even when the jokes diminish the dignity of another human being and to feel justified because you so adamantly disagree with that politician, but our common good will never rise with everyone throwing out verbal abuse on social media. God asks of you, courage - the courage to call forth the best from others, courage to gently and persistently resist anything less. It is staying in the relationship, respecting the person with whom you disagree. We cannot blame Washington for their lack of cooperation unless we are willing ourselves to cooperate and have meaningful dialogue. We have to play our role in bringing the rhetoric back down to a civil discourse. Because a culture of constant casual verbal brutality is toxic to body, mind, and soul, not to mention country.

And while our context is quite different from Joshua's, we still need to listen to God's reassurance that no matter what is going on, we can depend on God to be with us. Knowing the reassuring strength of God's presence is what secures us to be vulnerable, courageous, strong. Speaking of God being with us, you know that the Congregational Care Team of this church prays for everyone by name every day. Faithful Larry Forrester was one day out of surgery last and worried because he had forgotten to take his congregational care list to the hospital. Thank God Emily Miller called to check on him and she told him she'd take his prayer day.

Speaking of prayer, I must tell you about my desperate sudden prayer moment this week. Tuesday morning, right after studying this text, I drove to church coming north on White Eagle Parkway all the way to 64, across from Greyhawk. As I approached the fast-moving, always heavily trafficked 64, there to my immediate left at the edge of the highway were our deer family - mother and two fawns - on the wrong side of 64!

And mother knew they had to get to the other side, so there she stepped right out in front of four cars traveling at 60 miles per hour. I prayed

“Oh no, please God.” And all the cars came to a screeching halt. Mama Deer looked at them gratefully, and then courageously continued to the next set of lanes with cars traveling west. Not again! I’m thinking.

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The deer were moving at the speed of sandhill cranes, but miraculously, the other lanes of traffic also stopped just in time, none of them hitting each other or the deer. Breathing a sigh of relief, I thought about how God is often protecting us like that. We step out into a very dangerous situation, not even realizing how risky it is, and God has our back. Of course, you and I both know, we nor the deer walk away from every danger unscathed, but God gives us life, even in death. Death has been transformed such that it will never have the last word. Death’s most awful roar has been silenced, because we know it is not final. God’s love and welcome is the ultimate truth.

And God’s love was seen this week in the courage of those who joined the human chain of 80 people to rescue folks who were close to drowning up in the Panama City, Florida. A couple of boys were getting carried out too deep because of a riptide. Their mother went after them, and then grandmother and others. There were about 7-8 people in trouble in the deep water, screaming for help, so this woman named Jessica Simmons and her husband and 80 others began to recruit others form a human chain to save the lost. Grandmother by this time has had a heart attack in the water and kept falling off the raft, but all were safely brought to shore and grandma is in ICU, hopefully recovering.

Courage means being vulnerable enough to take your whole self into the deep waters of risk for the sake of others. As Eleanor Roosevelt said “You gain strength, confidence, and courage every time you look fear in the face, and you do the thing you think you cannot do.” Charles Dickens said even the sun is weak when it first rises, but then it grows in strength and courage to shine brightly. As Plato said, “Courage is knowing what NOT to fear.”