

First Presbyterian Church
Joshua 1:7-9, “Courageous”
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 9/25/2022

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Where has your heart been over the past week?

Where has the heart of our congregation been?

What we truly value is revealed by the attitude of our heart.

Last week I noted that a key factor when thinking about our core values is that they do not operate independently.

We don't ship out courage for some areas of church life
and being loving to another.

Rather when we value being God Centered, Open, Courageous, and Loving, we encounter these values in every area of church life.

One way to visualize this concept is to think of a puzzle.

Do we have any puzzlers in the house?

(I know we do because I've seen the hundreds of puzzles
brought by for our plants and puzzles events.)

What are the most important pieces of any puzzle? The corners!

[Blank corners slide]

The corners are our core values: God Centered – Open – Courageous – Loving

[Corners with values slide]

What are the next most important pieces of any puzzle? The edges.

The edges of our congregational puzzle are composed of our mission statement:

Together in Christ for All.

[Mission statement slide]

What is your most important resource when trying to figure out where a piece fits?

The box!

The big picture of our puzzle is our vision statement.
[Purple vision statement slide]

The vision statement is hanging on the wall outside the sanctuary.
It describes what it looks like when we express our core values
while pursuing our mission of being together in Christ for all.

If you want to go even further, the individual pieces of the puzzle
are each member of our congregation, friends, and partners
who share in ministry together.

I hope this helps you see how these three elements work with each other
to help support our life as a church and help us discern our calling
in this current time.

Last week we brought together God Centered and Open.
Today we focus on ... being courageous.

The book of Joshua begins with startling news: Moses is dead.
Moses: the central leader of Israel, who followed God's insane plan
to simply walk out of Egypt with all kinds of treasure
and pass through the Red Sea on dry land
while supernatural forces held Imperial forces at bay.
Moses: who received the 10 commandments, the heart of God's law.
Moses: who stood by this grumbling group of malcontents through 40 years
in the desert and led them right up to the edge of the promised land.

With Moses dead, Israel would need a new leader, and the Lord, Yahweh, called
upon Joshua.

In order to prepare him to step into these massive shoes, Yahweh needed to have a
word with Joshua, and the opening verses of the book allow us to listen in.

In vv. 6-8, each verse expands on a parallel phrase found in the previous one.

- (6) Be strong/courageous → (7) very strong/courageous
- (7) don't turn right or left → (8) keep this Law always on your lips
- (7) that you may succeed → (8) then you will prosper and then your way will succeed.

The key phrase is, Be strong and courageous.

Sounds like an excellent pep-talk, to me.

But put yourself in Joshua's shoes.

Imagine you just got a new job, and your supervisor says:
"Hey, just remember: you can do this. You'll need to be strong. And courageous.
I mean ... really, really courageous.

You know, most people would completely lose their minds
if they had to do this, so, you know – give it all you got.
Seriously, whatever happens, trust me.
And DO. NOT. PANIC."

I mean, it's encouraging, but it also highlights the fact that
there is significant danger involved with the job, right?

If you were to hear this call to be strong and courageous,
how would that land for you?

The reality is that we need courage to walk forward in faith
even when we are afraid.

Here these people are in the desert and there is a lot of uncertainty.

They are only there because they have remained centered on God
and the promised God has made.

They have also had to be open to life looking differently
than they may have imagined when they left Egypt.

Now God is calling Joshua to add being courageous
to his God centered and open values.

It is God's presence in our lives that enables us to be strong and courageous
so that our way will prosper.

The message is,
"God is with you, so now you can be strong."

We learn through Jesus that the way of courage is not necessarily being the big hero, stepping into a dramatic moment.

Those moments may come

but for most of us our lives are more mundane.

To live courageously means to step into unknown circumstances with faith that God is with us.

In the Wednesday Bible study (which you are welcome to join!)

I learned about courage according to Aristotle's "golden mean."

Aristotle contended that courage is found in the balance

between cowardice on one side and recklessness on the other.

Consider that while reflecting on this story about Bishop Desmond Tutu

as recounted by Alexia Salvatierra in her book *Faith Rooted Organizing*.

"Bishop Desmon Tutu of South Africa was threatened by the government to stop speaking out against apartheid. On one Easter morning soldiers were sent to his church. They lined the walls of the sanctuary holding loaded rifles. The congregation was frightened that Bishop Tutu would speak against apartheid and that the soldiers would start shooting. They were also frightened that he would not speak—for then the regime would have effectively won.

"Bishop Tutu began bouncing on his heels and laughing, laughing uproariously, laughing like a child. The laughter was contagious. Soon everyone was laughing, even some of the soldiers. In the midst of the laughter, Bishop Tutu cried out to the soldiers, 'Little Brothers, you know that God is a God of justice, the God of the Exodus. You know that we are going to win. We don't want you to miss out on the moment of celebration. Join us now! The party wouldn't be complete without you.' Bishop Tutu went on to preach against apartheid and he was not shot."

The life of faith is not a life of comfort and ease.

It is a life that requires courage.

Why?

Because the world (not the creation itself but what Darrell Johnson calls

"humanity organizing itself independently from God")

is at odds with the ways of God who is love.

To live centered around a God of self-giving love,
to live open to the empowering presence of God's Spirit
is to live in contradiction to the logic and presumptions
of the visible powers at work around us.

That takes courage.

There are many forms of courage we need:

Courage to own up to our faults and mistakes.

Courage to face the pandemic.

Courage to walk with a loved one through illness.

Courage to speak out to support people who are being unfairly treated.

Courage to love and care for people we have a hard time being with.

Courage to change how we operate as the church.

Living out of our values takes courage.

It's much easier to live in a way that makes other people
bell hooks was a Black author and social activist
who was Distinguished Professor in Residence at Berea College
in Kentucky for many years before she died in 2021.

Listen to her story of how impactful it can be when people
have the courage to live into their values:

“Talking to a university audience recently I expressed my faith in the power of white people to speak out against racism, challenging and changing prejudice—emphatically stating that I definitely believe we can all change our minds and our actions. I stressed that this faith was not rooted in a utopian longing but, rather, that I believed this because of our nation's history of the many individuals who have offered their lives in the service of justice and freedom.

“When challenged by folks who claimed that these individuals were exceptions, I agreed. But I then talked about the necessity of changing our thinking so that we see ourselves as being like the one who does change rather than among those who refuse to change. What made these individuals exceptional was not that they were any smarter or kinder than their neighbors but that they were willing to live the truth of their values.”

Our congregation is in a time when we need to lean into our values.

We need to go deeper with putting God in the center of our life together
and in the center of our lives, period.

We need to take the door to our church, the door to our homes,
the door to our relationships, and push it further open.

Open to the new possibilities God may have in store for us.

Open to being challenged on our assumptions.

Open to learning from our neighbors.

And we need to live with courage.

Living by our values requires courage.

Treasuring these things above complacency
and apathy takes some guts.

Take a moment and consider something you need to do but are afraid to do it.

A hard conversation. A boundary that needs to be set.

A task that feels like moving a mountain.

Invite someone to pray for you about this.

Share your fear with someone you trust.

Has the Lord not commanded you?

Be strong and courageous. Be very courageous!

Friends, the Triune God of Grace is with you wherever you go.

What do we have to fear?

What can we be afraid of if God is on our side?

Let us cast off all that hinders us and step into the unknown

with confidence that we are the chosen people of God for this time
and this place.