

Message 05-17-2020

Good morning everyone. I hope you have had a great week and you enjoyed Mother's day. It has been about two months since we started sharing the message online as opposed to in person. I don't know about you but I am ready for this to be over and for things to get back to normal. I know that same hope is shared by many of you and unfortunately the reality is that we don't know how much longer this will go on. I wanted to touch on the state of our well being during this time and our relationship with God.

For you graduates, both high school and college, these times are so far what anybody imagined but amidst these changes there are ways we can look at our past and look at the future with less fear and anxiety.

The passage that I will be using is from Joshua chapter 1. I will just give a little history about Joshua. Joshua was born Hosea ben Nun in Egypt in the year 1355 BCE and like Moses he was hidden in the Nile after birth to escape Pharaoh's decree that all newborn Hebrew males be drowned in the river. Now Joshua was with Moses for the entire time that the Israelites wandered around for forty years. He was Mose's faithful disciple. Joshua is representative of the trait of devotion and commitment. In 1312 he was one of twelve spies dispatched by Moses to scout the land of Canaan and he was one of two that went into Jericho and brought back a positive report regarding the Promised Land.

One thing I would like you to consider is that Moses was not allowed into the Promised Land. He was not going to be able to see this place because of things that had happened with the Israelites during those 40 years. Joshua has been with Moses for all of this time, from the time that left Egypt until the time that they do go into the Promised Land. The passage I am going to share with you is from Joshua 1:1-9.

Joshua 1:1-9 (NIV)

Joshua Installed as Leader

1 After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: 2 "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to

them—to the Israelites. 3 I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. 4 Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. 5 No one will 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 never leave you nor forsake you. 6 Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. 7 “Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

So in this passage God is giving instructions to Joshua about what he would like him to do but that is not all he is giving to Joshua. God is giving Joshua words of encouragement. He is giving him words of assurance and words of protection. God is telling Joshua that he is going to be the backstop for this endeavor to take the Israelites into the Promised Land. But here is where the passage becomes interesting. As I mentioned earlier, Joshua has been with this group for the entire 40 years. He himself followed the pillar of flame at night and the clouds by day. He saw the parting of the Red Sea. He saw so many of God's miracles. Manna from heaven, birds dropping from the sky, water coming from a rock. How is it now that God is sharing these words with Joshua?

He is sharing these words for a couple of reasons. First God is giving Joshua assurance and giving him the confidence he needs to take on this endeavor. But God knows the Hebrews, He knows about their complaints and their constant whining throughout this 40 years and he knows how unstable their faith is. They had the golden calf because they lacked faith in what Moses was doing when he was in conversation with God. So many times they showed a lack of faith in all these years so it is not surprising to God that these people will again lack faith. So he gives this message to Joshua to reassure him that wherever he goes God is watching his back. So looking at this, I want us to think about ourselves and our lives. God knows us. He knows our fears, he knows our anxieties and he knows how much strength we have.

With regard to this passage I would like you to think about time in your life or experiences you have had that were very difficult. How did you feel going through those times? Did you feel that God was with you? Was faith an active part of your life during that experience? Do you look back at those times and see how you could have done things differently? Do you look back and feel that you have learnt something from that experience that you are able to use in your life now? There is that saying about hindsight being 20/20. When we look back on situations, we can look at what we may have done wrong and how we might have reacted differently having that hindsight. Sometimes those difficult times can be learning experiences.

I would like you to think about those experiences and think about your present situation and acknowledge the fact that you came through that experience AND you survived that arduous ordeal whatever it may have been. There may still be scars or painful reminders of it but the fact is you endured it and you came out of it. Imagine that ordeal as being in a giant ball pit and you're struggling to get out. There are all these obstacles and you are trying to wade your way through. The longer the struggle or event the harder it seems to reach the end.

Now try to imagine or try to somehow understand that God was with you during those times.. God was present in your life and he was right beside you. You may have almost gotten to the end point and felt as though you had no strength and maybe he was there to pull you out to the other side. You may be a little worse for wear but the victory is that you made it through that experience and survived.

Taking into consideration God's presence in these struggles, ask yourself again now if you felt that God was present. Those experiences are things we can add to what I would like to call our faith bucket. Those memories are assurances from God that he is there and he is present in our lives. He knows us and our limitations, he knows our strengths and he knows our weaknesses. Sometimes he won't come to rescue right away because he knows we have a little bit more within us to do it ourselves. The point I would like to stress is that even though we may feel that God is absent sometimes in our lives, when we look back on all of those difficult times and trials and look at how you came through that event, you need to consider yourself as a survivor. Whether you realize it or not God was there. Viewing that event with the given that God was present, your perspective on that experience may shift and God's presence may become more apparent to you. Once that becomes apparent then every other hardship

becomes one more experience you can throw into the faith bucket as proof of God's presence, his willingness to be there, and his wanting to be in relationship with us.

When we look back and accept that God was with us, and humbly and acknowledge his presence and glorify his work in us, we can also look back at those other hard times and find reassurance that God was indeed walking alongside us. The assurance we received in the past in reassurance that God will be present in the future as well.

Right now we are in a time that is different from anything that we have ever imagined. It is especially hard because we are coming to realize just how much we need other people. So many times, people can be just plain annoying, when we are driving, when we are shopping, etc. So often other people are the bane of our existence or just plain irritating but during this time now, we are just really missing that fellowship, that communion with other people and just the everyday activity and normal things that we were doing before the pandemic hit us. With this message from Joshua, I would like you to look for things now that are reminders of normalcy or reminders of things we used to do before when things were normal...Some of these reminders can provide assurance that things will get back to normal.

Yesterday I was working on my sermon and it was such a beautiful day so I decided to sit outside for awhile. It was gorgeous. The weather was perfect, and then I started noticing things around me. I started listening to lawn mowers, dogs playing outside, seeing people going for walks, kids playing. Down the street I heard music from a band and every single one of those things were reminders that these things are things that people would do in normal circumstances. It seemed like a reminder that okay now we are moving into summer and these are the things we do during this season. Those are the moments we should treasure. Everything we see around us that seems to lead back to the old normal is a blessing. Hearing those familiar signs and smelling the flowers in bloom should give us reassurance and hope that things will get back to normal and that is God's way of telling us he is present.

I hope this message is able to give you some encouragement.

Even if you aren't an older person with much experience, even if you are in high school or college, take a look back at times that were tough for you. Perhaps you had a falling out with a friend or didn't make the team, understand that you did make it through and

that God was with you. God was and is rooting for you. He is on your side and he will be there for you.

Though we don't know how long this pandemic will last or how long things will be out of sorts, God is with us and he will get us through this. There is something to look forward to because our own survival is proof of this. We can make things easier by reaching out to others by phone, email, sending a card or with Facetime or Zoom. You could go for a walk and give someone a wave and a shout out.

It is hard being isolated and not having the ability to spend time with others and perhaps the result of this is that we will be thankful for all of those small interchanges that do occur in our everyday normal lives. Maybe now we can truly appreciate and begin to love all of those interactions we have with all of God's children, not just the people we like. Maybe we look at those exchanges now as blessings and really become intentional during those times in the future. They may not have been so important a few months ago but now we miss those little conversations and we yearn for them. Those times will be back too because just as God was with before, he is with us now and will be alongside us all the way.

Be hopeful and keep safe. As John Wesley says, do good, do no harm and stay in love with God. I hope you have a great week and thank you for listening. To the graduates, I hope you have a special week and I hope you have a lovely commencement ceremony next Sunday. Thanks.

Birthdays

Sheldahl

Bruce Dryzcimski May 19

Slater

Kimberly Zenor May 19

Molly Astarita May 20

Tina Compton May 21

Craig Conley May 21

Emma Utley May 22

Chuck Hoeven May 23

Amber Shill May 23

Nancy Thornwall May 23

Graduating Seniors

Reilly Baker

Logan Conley

Jake Frederick

Emily Huisinga

Frankie Munson

Sam Salasek

Alison Van Ersvelde