

The Next Right Thing
March 22, 2020
Maple Grove UMC
Sermon by Reverend Patricia Wagner

Old Testament Lesson Joshua 1: 1-9

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. 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."

We've all had some very long days, haven't we? There's so much to do, it's been overwhelming.

On Friday night, we finally rented a video: *Frozen 2*. Rose's choice.

and it was pretty wonderful.

as the sisters Elsa. the Ice Queen,

and Anna, whose more like us, except eyes like does

and the voice of Kristen Bell, are called out by another voice, heard only by Elsa,

into the unknown

not as harsh as the actual reality we're facing

but life-threatening and life changing.

It gets grim,
Change that seems to be death comes

and Anna, the younger non-magical sister, gets overwhelmed

I've seen dark before, but not like this This is cold, this is empty, this is numb The life I knew is over, the lights are out Hello, darkness, I'm ready to succumb This grief has a gravity, it pulls me down But a tiny voice whispers in my mind You are lost, hope is gone

The life I knew is over....

We wake up in the mornings, now,

and we soon remember that life is changed. School as we know it, work as we know it,

the economy, we knew changed.

I have family in Seattle and New York City

and they haven't been well for weeks.

some really sick, every symptom, but no tests

so If everyone in my family in the direct path of this storm

are sick, to varying degrees, then I can only assume,

that we, and especially worrisome, the most vulnerable among us are just weeks away from this scenario ourselves.

Can there be a day beyond this night? asks Anna?

I don't know any more what is true, I can't find my direction, I'm all alone. The only star that guided me was you.

Cathy Davis drew our attention this powerful passage

in Joshua this week.

I had never spent time with it before.

Moses, the savior of his people, has died, and God says to Joshua

now, then, it's up to you.

you lead my people across the Jordan to safety.

And Joshua's thinking,
like we are, and most people on earth who are paying attention: how can we save others

we can't even save ourselves We're not ready for this.

The bible may not have a lot of scriptures about pandemics,

but it is full of stories of people who doubt their ability to face what's inevitably coming.

Moses was decades in the wilderness felt hopeless Elijah struggled with doubt and depression

Everyone of Jesus' disciples struggled, Jesus himself: *Father, let this cup pass from me...*

But the word of the spirit of God reaches through worry and fear and doubt and dread.

God says to Joshua, Chapter 1, verse 5:

As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor

⁶

⁷ "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant

forsake you.

Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be

Be strong and courageous, because you will lead my people.....

⁸

written in it.

Be strong and courageous. (A third time!) Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

Jesus, Elijah, Peter, Paul, Mary of Magdala
They aren't being brave to impress someone

to be above others, superhuman.

They are being called to have courage **for** something for someone, for others, for creation,

How about us?

We are worried, and anxious,

and wonder if God's in this at all with us but the thing is, in the midst of all this

that is and is to come,

when you and I still sense a call to do something

to be the church,

Well then, as Pastor Crawford Loritts
of Fellowship Baptist Church in Roswell, Georgia says,

Our courage in this moment comes from God's call upon us. and God's call upon us is a statement of God's presence.

Our courage to meet the day, this moment in time and the days and weeks to come isn't about **us**. *our courage rests upon our assurance*

successful wherever you go.

lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything

9

Keep this Book of the Law always on your

Have I not commanded you?

based on the call upon us,

that God is with us.

So what to do:
Gosh, I wonder about that.

Governor DeWine, like a lot of us
are awake at night, wondering what else we should
be doing.

And he comes up with at least one more thing every day

for us to do, one more step toward blunting the power of that storm

There's courage in doing so.

*"Take a step. Step again. It is all that I can do" says Anna.
Just one step. And then another. The next right thing.*

Buck,

They kept taking steps back to life.
That step taking is at the heart of recovery groups.

in the *The Big Book*, the founding book of Alcoholics Anonymous

Anonymous writes:

"We earnestly pray for the right ideal, for guidance in each questionable
situation, for sanity, and for the strength to do the right thing.

To not take that next drink
is to do the next right thing.

Anna, in this story, goes deep into her pain
and she realizes that she also has to keep moving.

That lyric from *Frozen* is by Kristen Anderson-Lopez who was inspired by two co-
workers

Andrew Page and Chris who each lost a child during production.

I won't look too far ahead It's too much for me to take

(Don't you feel like that right now? I do!) *But break it down to this next breath,
this next step This next choice is one that I can make*

*So I'll walk through this night Stumbling blindly toward the light And do the next
right thing*

*And, with it done, what comes then? When it's clear that everything
will never be the same again Then I'll make the choice to hear that voice And do
the next right thing*

Joshua, called by God, thus assured of God's presence that says, be not afraid, be
not discouraged

for the Lord, your God will be with you.
Stumble forward into the unknown,

and do the next right thing.

Pastor Lorittes quotes Philips Brooks, who said: "Don't ask for tasks equal to your
powers.

Ask for powers equal to your tasks." Power for all of us, leaders of the world

ordinary people like us
called to the next right thing.

God seems to be speaking to the governor and Director of Public health every
day:

This is the next right thing to do to

We want to, and need to listen to them.

Then, to go deep ourselves,
what is God calling forth from us, right now?

What's God's presence giving us the assurance to do, now.

This what I'm hearing:

- Be sober-minded
- Resist Panic
- When you feel anxious, move to prayer, especially prayer for others.
- When you feel powerless, move to action for others.
- Attend calmly to your daily life
- Practice generosity - share food and necessities
- Care for the sick and the vulnerable
- Make a plan in case **you** are the one to get sick
- Resist demonizing others. We have to work on this!

There's a sign company on Indianola right across from Schreyer Road, and it has a sign in

Neon that reads "Same Team"

- Remember what God has brought you through what God has brought the world through
- Remember that you are part of a community

And remember! You have been called -
that is a sign of God's presence

and that presence will give you courage.

And so, we are going to take one step
and care for one another, and care for the hungry

and homeless, and then, together,
then the next step, then the next . . .

The next right thing.