

Promised Land: Doing Laundry with God
Joshua, Judges, Ruth
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On any given Tuesday, if you stop by the Cornell house, what you find will not be something all that remarkable, no sonnets being written or no theological expositions poured over, no invention happening, or any other creative genius for that matter. That's because Tuesday in the Cornell household is laundry day. When Amy is at White's Residential Services all day, ministering to the students and faculty of that campus, daddy has a special day with Christian and Annie jumping into piles of clean clothes and trying to fold them before Annie knocks them over.

It was so funny – just a few weeks ago, I was home with the kids and I called Rick up on the phone, and as we were talking I asked him, “Hey, what are you up to right now?” He said, “I’m just folding laundry,” and I said, “Guess what...me too!”

Life is not meant to be lived with our foot perpetually on the gas. Inevitably, there will be down time. We live in a society in which burn out is a very real danger because people have lost touch with what it means to live in healthy rhythms. Researchers and physicians have actually come up with a label for this epidemic of our culture. They call it Hurry Sickness. Hurry Sickness is when we move everywhere fast. This racing mind syndrome prevents us thinking deeply and prolonged. Hurry Sickness actually deteriorates our personality; we can't form pleasant memories because in our rush, we can't dwell in any moment for longer than a moment.

This sort of discontentment is probably what the Israelites felt as they wandered the wilderness, worried about the next step. And as a result, they lost touch with who they were and where they were going. Last week, I suggested that what God was saying to them is: **I know you're lost and disoriented and you don't know where you are, but I know where you are and I know where you are going. I know you feel hurried and harried, but “I am” with you.**

Today, we move with Israel into a new chapter of their journey with God: a life of rest and routine, a life in between big events. So I invite you to open your pew Bible with me to the first chapter of the book of Joshua. And out of respect for the authority of God's Word, would you stand and read along with me as we listen to the Word of the Lord.

“Be strong and of good courage; for you shall cause this people to inherit the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good

courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

Joshua is just sworn into office and is not given the luxury of a honeymoon period. Israel is on the home stretch of their journey through the wilderness, and immediately he is to lead them over the Jordan River and into some daunting territory. Strategically, Israel must drive west from the Jordan River up the mountains driving a wedge between the territory of Canaan and then take them one at a time beginning with the south. This must have been a good plan, because the British field marshal Edmund Allenby used the same method in WWI in the liberation of Palestine. Before them is the fortified city of Jericho.

But before they embark, the Lord says to Joshua, “Be strong and courageous, I am giving you this land that was promised to your forefathers.” Two more times God says, “Be strong and courageous, God is with you.” God is reminding Joshua what it takes to be a good leader, courage and strength obviously highly valuable. But be careful not to gloss over verse 8. God also says, “Let the Word of God and these laws never depart from you, meditate on them, listen to them, allow your life to be saturated by what is written here, for then you shall make your way prosperous.”

In the midst of this high energy, adrenaline- and testosterone-filled charge filled with strength and courage, there is verse 8. Be strong and courageous...BUT...let God do the leading. The Hebrew word in verse 8 for *meditate* is a word that literally translates, “to growl or mutter.” It creates the image of a person sort of reading aloud under their breath. Your strength and courage comes when you meditate, literally, when you mumble these words to yourself over and over again. So that when God leads us into a new place, we go with the Word of God on our lips. “The walls are high, but will you trust that I am higher, the obstacle is big, I am bigger? The way is difficult, but I am stronger and my way is ultimately the way of rest.” God always seems to disrupt our plans to say, “No, I want you to do it this way.”

So Israel’s first challenge as they enter the Promised Land is the ancient and fortified city of Jericho. In Chapter 6, it says that Jericho was shut up from within and from without because of the people of Israel (if that isn’t a metaphor for the mainline Presbyterian Church in America, I don’t know what is.) And the Lord says, “See, I’ve given it into your hands, and here’s your MO. I want you to walk around the city for six days, THEN on the seventh day, I want you to do it seven times. Then I want you to blow your trumpets and scream your heads off.”

Only God would have a battle plan like this. Can you imagine Joshua trying to explain this strategy to his soldiers? I imagine the soldier of Israel like the scene from *Return of the King* where the soldiers of Rohan and Gondor are getting ready to try and defend the white city of Minas Tirith and they’re practicing their maneuvers and sharpening their swords the night before. They’re getting pumped up for battle, building their strength and courage. Joshua says, “No, no, it won’t be anything like that. We’re just going to walk in circles for a week.”

For seven days, the Hebrews simply walked silently around the city. Can you imagine what they must have been thinking while they were doing it? Can you imagine how tense and anxious these moments must have been? But perhaps therein lies the lesson: God leads his people into their new land, the land that they were given, to rest and be with God especially in the routines of daily life. Life is full of down time, unexciting activity, daily tasks that are essential to our flourishing and yet can feel, in the moment, like watching paint dry. But learning to be obedient and find God's presence even in folding clothes or doing the dishes or making copies or going to the grocery, is what these three books are all about.

Joshua—About doing the right things with the wrong tools. Thought they were going to take Jericho with swords, but it was with trumpets. God is the one who led the way.

Judges – Questions the goals of our lives. Refrain: “They did what was right in their own eyes.”

Ruth – Finding encouragement in changing our attitudes. If we're worn out and discouraged, maybe it's because we've got the wrong attitudes.

How many of you have ever felt like life can be an exercise in *Déjà vu*? Does it ever seem like we have the tendency to revisit the same challenges, we have the same routines, we struggle with the same people and have the same conversations over and over and over? Sometimes it just feels like we're circling and circling.

Nowhere else in the Old Testament do you get a picture of people living the normal routines of life more vividly than in Joshua, Judges, and Ruth. And what we learn from them is that God loves routines. Sometimes, the routines of life can seem so tedious and boring that we think, how could God be at work in this? But whether it is Joshua and the soldiers walking around the city for days on end, or the Judges mediating little squabbles between people over menial things, or whether it was Ruth going to the threshing floor day in and day out to glean for her family, God was in the routines. These three books are so everyday and relatable that we can see ourselves in these stories, too.

Sometimes life is all about circling, doing the regular things with irregular joy and contentment.

The devotional writer Oswald Chambers writes that we think that we are called to do exceptional things. We are not; we are called to do ordinary things in an exceptional way.

New Testament Scholars have added up the days of ministry that are accounted for in the New Testament, and all total they only count for a quarter of Jesus' days with his disciples. Isn't that a striking statistic, 3 out of every 4 days that Jesus was with Matthew Mark, Luke, and John, he said, “Put down your pens, fellas. Don't bother writing this one down.” That means that there was a lot of down time with Jesus.

Author and Pastor Craig Barnes tells it this way: Imagine you win the lottery and get the chance to go back in time and spend a day with Jesus. Presumably when you get there in your time machine, Peter would be there to greet you, “Welcome, we’re glad you’re here. We hope you enjoy your day with Jesus. And oh, by the way, today is laundry day.” “Oh, man, I was really hoping to see a blind guy healed or a demon kicked out, or sit in on a great teaching session.” Nope. Laundry.

And then you realize that this is the story you are going to tell for the rest of your life, that you got the chance to do laundry with Jesus. And then it dawns on you: that is exactly what you do every single Tuesday (or whatever day you do laundry). You do these ordinary, circling things with Jesus. God loves routine. These are probably not the earth shattering words of inspiration you came here this morning to hear, but there they are. God loves routine. And in routine, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are joined with Christ who is at work all over the place bringing new life into our routines.

Our success, our vitality as a church will not come by our training or our sophistication. It won’t come from having an arguably well-spoken minister or a top-flight music program. And it certainly won’t come from our building and its bells and whistles. No, Joshua tells us that our success as God’s community, as the community of Christ at Wabash Presbyterian Church, comes from circling around with God. Meditating on God’s Word, and doing it over and over and over again, because God loves routine. I mean, who do you think created routine? The entire cosmos hangs together how? By routine.

And when the routines of our lives flow on with endless praise to God, as the old hymn says, the result? Doxology, gratitude. How can I keep from singing? How can we keep from praising? How can we keep from letting our abundantly good and faithful God permeate our lives and do miraculous things? This is the miracle of the mundane, circling with God, walls come down, relationships restored, life beginning again. But remember, it’s God who brings the walls down. All we do is walk forward, praising, resting, and living in the beautiful rhythms of everyday life with God.

Let us pray.