Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho
Joshua fought the battle of Jericho
and the walls came a-tumbling down

Last week we talked about that Hebrew Superman, Moses. This week we're going to talk about his successor, Joshua. Today's passage from Joshua 24 is Joshua's closing speech to the people of Israel. It's his notorious speech that contains his infamous declaration, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Just as the story of Moses' death in Deuteronomy 34 gave us license to look at highlights from Moses' life, our passage today gives us license to do the same thing for Joshua. In reviewing Joshua's life, we'll be able to see that God's grace goes before us, God's presence strengthens us, and how our response should be a lifetime of faithful service.

Sooner or later we find ourselves standing at a crossroads. Someone we depended on is no longer beside us. A familiar season ends. A responsibility comes that we never expected to carry. We wonder whether we have enough wisdom, enough strength, or enough faith for the next step.

Joshua's life speaks to these very moments. His story stretches from service beside Moses to leadership at the Jordan, from victories and painful failures to a final call to covenant faithfulness. The thread holding that life together isn't Joshua's greatness. It is God's faithfulness.

As we follow Joshua's journey, listen for these invitations: First, receive God's grace, Second, take the next faithful step, and Third, help someone else learn to walk with God.

We meet Joshua carrying responsibility before he carries the leadership of a nation. He leads in battle against the Amalekites, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur support the people in prayer. It is Aaron and Hur who hold up Moses' hands in prayer. When Moses' hands were lifted in prayer Israel prevailed, when those hands dropped, the Amalekites prevailed. Guess who won that battle?

Later, Joshau accompanies Moses as his assistant on that journey up to Mt. Sinai. There Moses will receive the Commandments of God. Fighting battles, serving, developing a relationship with Moses, spending time in God's presence. All a part of Joshua's preparation for leadership.

Its human nature isn't? Wanting to bypass the apprenticeship and go straight to the assignment. I mean, who needs to read a manual? But faithful service and proper preparation is not a waste of time. Teaching a disciple, visiting someone who is lonely, preparing a meal, or quietly praying for the church are places where God forms us.

It sounds a lot like our Wesleyan Way of Salvation. We can recognize grace already at work before we understand where our journey will lead. God is not waiting for us to become impressive. God meets us right where we are and begins shaping willing hearts. Where is God forming you through a responsibility you might otherwise overlook?

Joshua and Caleb stand apart when the spies return from Canaan. The obstacles are real, but they refuse to let fear become the final authority. They alone express confidence in God when they say in Numbers 13:30, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." As a result of their confidence, out of all the spies sent into the promised land, only Joshua and Caleb will be allowed to enter it.

Faith doesn't mean denying hard situations. Church family, St. John's is no stranger to grief, limited resources, and uncertainty. But we don't use these as an excuse to surrender our call to love our neighbors. Courage says: the challenge is real, AND God does not abandon us. (Repeat & have congregation say along)

Joshua lives through years of wilderness waiting. He shows us that trust does not guarantee immediate results. To be faithful means to walk with our community, even when the road is long. Which of your fears needs to be brought into prayer rather than allowed to make every decision?

Moses dies and Joshua is asked to take up a task larger than himself. God's call to courage doesn't come with empty words. Listen to the promises made to Joshua in chapter 1. Be strong and courageous, for you shall lead this people to possess the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. 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." Joshua is not asked to manufacture confidence out of thin air. He is asked to trust and obey.

Courage grows through those practices, those means of grace that keep us open to, well, grace: searching the Scriptures, prayer, worship, Holy Communion, and Christian fellowship. By these we don't earn God's love, we learn to receive and respond to the love God freely gives.

Joshua's question was not, "Can I become another Moses," but "Will I be faithful to the work God has placed before me?"

At the Jordan, Joshua leads the Israelites into a new chapter. At that crossing, the 12 stones placed in the dry middle will become a witness for the generations who did not experience that moment themselves. The people are to remember and tell what God has done.

Church family, St. Johns will be 138 years old this month. More than a century of warm and beautiful memories that we want to cherish. But we need more than memories of what our congregation once was if we're to make it into the promised land. We need today's living testimonies of grace: today's forgiveness offered, today's neighbors welcomed, today's hungry people fed, and today's people sustained through sorrow. Let's remember rightly, but let's not let memories of the past trap us into yesterday. Instead, let those memories give us courage to serve today's needs.

What story of God's faithfulness are we teaching our children? What will they learn from the way we treat people outside our doors?

Joshua's story includes the heroic defeat of Jericho, but it also includes Israel's defeat at Ai and the deception involving the Gibeonites. They don't have an uninterrupted march of success. Disobedience will have consequences, and decisions made without seeking God's guidance will bring trouble.

Joshua's story also contains difficult accounts of warfare and destruction. Don't be tempted to rush past these sufferings or turn them into permission to harm others. Today, as Christians, we must read them in the light of Jesus, who calls us to love our enemies and be peacemakers. Our neighbors are not obstacles to conquer; they are people to love.

Rahab's place in the story also interrupts easy assumptions about insiders and outsiders. Her household is spared, and she finds a place among God's people. She even shows up in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew. So today, let's be careful about deciding who God may welcome.

Joshua experiences disappointments, such as when Achan took spoils from Jericho against direct orders. This led to their defeat by a small army in little ole Ai. Disappointments are vehicles, calling us toward humility, repentance, and accountability. Grace is not permission to avoid responsibility. Grace makes it possible to confess, receive forgiveness, and learn a different way of living. Where do we need to stop defending ourselves and begin seeking God's guidance together?

Joshua's later years include the distribution of the land and the work of helping the people settle into their shared life. Caleb's inheritance recalls a faith that has endured across the years. Joshua's calling is not only to lead through crisis, but to help a community live faithfully afterward.

Near the end of his life, Joshua gathers the people and recalls God's acts on their behalf. Before calling for their commitment, he tells the story of God's faithfulness. Grace comes first; our response follows.

Then comes the challenge of Joshua 24: whom will you serve? Joshua declares the direction of his own household. This question is so much more than a slogan displayed in a home. It asks what our calendars, spending, relationships, and daily choices reveal about our loyalties.

Here at St. John's we can make our response concrete through our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. Holiness is not merely avoiding wrong. It is growing in love of God and neighbor, so that worship and mercy belong together in the same life.

Joshua dies, but the call to covenant faithfulness continues. His legacy presses a question on us: are we only doing the work ourselves, or are we helping the next generation know and serve God?

Joshua's life gives us a pattern to carry home: serve before seeking recognition; trust when fear is loud; receive courage from God's presence; remember grace; repent when you fail; and help others choose faithful service.

No, we aren't standing beside the Jordan, but we might stand before a conversation, a new responsibility, a needed apology, or a call to serve. We don't have to see the whole road to take the next faithful step.

This week, try choosing one practice that opens your heart to God and one act of mercy that opens your life to a neighbor. Pray with someone. Reconcile where you can. Share what you have. Invite someone into the work rather than carrying it alone.

We don't do these things to become fearless heroes. We do this because we believe that the God who calls us will remain with us.

Church family let's turn our response into commitment. Let's choose one faithful step to take this week. Not everything at once, just one specific act of love. Here are a few places to start.

Pray: Set aside time each day to ask, "God, whom are you calling me to love and serve?"

Serve: Choose one person to encourage, visit, call, or help with a practical need. Decide today when you will reach out.

Walk together: Tell someone you trust about your commitment. Ask that person to pray with you and check in with you during the week.

If you are ready, make this your prayer: “Lord, by your grace, I choose to serve you. Show me my next faithful step and help me take it.”

Whether you are beginning again, seeking courage, or ready to serve in a new way, there is a step you can take. Let our answer be more than words spoken in worship. Let it become love our neighbors can experience.

Then the lamb ram sheep horns began to blow
The trumpets began to sound
Joshua commanded the children to shout
and the walls came a-tumblin' down (that mornin')

Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho
Joshua fought the battle of Jericho
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Let us pray. Faithful God, you meet us in wilderness seasons and at unfamiliar crossings. Give us the courage to trust you, the humility to seek your wisdom, and the honesty to repent when we fail. Form us through prayer, Scripture, worship, and fellowship. Make our church family a community of welcome, mercy, and peace. Help us teach the next generation through lives that reflect your love. Lead us in the way of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen