

## Sermon 21<sup>st</sup> June 2020

Do you remember when your parent, usually your dad was teaching you to swim. After all the weeks of instruction, the gentle coaching and the various attempts to drown yourself it came to that fateful moment when you had to set off from the side of the pool on your own for the first time. I remember dad hovering less than an arm's length away encouraging, exhorting and challenging me to let go and swim on my own. Inside I was terrified, certain despite my dad's presence I would instantly drown if I released my vice like grip on the side of the pool. Nothing that dad could do or say could allay the fear and terror that gripped me. I remember sitting in car on the way home utterly crushed. That was until Dad asked shall we give it another go next week Keith? Perhaps next time I would master my fear rather than my fear mastering me.

I think there is a lot of fear in our reading this morning as the Israelite nation stand ready again to enter the Promised Land and as new and untested leader, Joshua prepares to fill Moses pretty huge shoe. However, the focus of our passage, isn't initially the fear of the Israelite nation or Joshua, no the focus is God and His faithfulness.

God has once more brought His chosen people to the border of Canaan and in doing so He is honouring an agreement or covenant he made originally over four hundred years before to Abraham and reaffirmed several time over those long years.

In the covenant, you can think of a Covenant as a legally binding contract, God promised that Abraham would become the father of a nation and promised that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan. **Genesis 17: 7, 8** *"I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."*

So, some four hundred and fortyish years later Abrahams descendent stood ready to enter the land promised by God to them. But there was a problem, forty years earlier their parents, relatives and leaders had been poised to enter the Promised Land and had refused to enter the land due to fear. The Israelite people's fear leads to a failure to trust and obey God. As a result, they rebel against God's plan for them to enter the land he promised to Abraham. God had brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt, given the law at Mt. Horeb (Sinai), and brought the people swiftly to the borders of the promised land. According to the book of Numbers, God asks Moses to send out spies to survey the land he is giving to the Israelites, and Moses obeys. When some of the spies return with a favourable report, the Israelites still refuse to enter the land. They rather listened to the reports of the spies who told them "The people are stronger and taller than we (giants); the cities are large and fortified up to heaven." At that moment they lose heart and their courage fails. One translation says, "their hearts melted". Even though Moses assures the people that God will fight for them just as he did in Egypt, they do not trust God to fulfil his promises. Fear leads to disobedience which leads to severe punishment.

Because of this disobedience, of the adult Israelites living at the time they are barred from entering the promised land. The only exceptions are Caleb and Joshua, the only members of the scouting expedition who encouraged the Israelites to obey God's command. Moses himself is also barred from entering the land due to a different act of disobedience which you can read about in more details in **Numbers 20:2-12**.

So once more the Israelite nations stands at the borders of the "Promised Land", looking to new and as of yet untried leader Joshua who was Moses's appointed successor.

I suspect Joshua felt both the exhilaration and the pressure of leading in such a pivotal time. He needed strength and courage for the same obstacles that so daunted and terrified the previous generation still loomed large ahead. The Promised Land is not a land filled only with milk and honey. It is also filled with giant people who are well-prepared to fight. As one historian describes it: "From personal observation Joshua knew that the Canaanites and others were vigorous people who lived in strongly fortified cities. Frequent battles kept their warriors in trim fighting condition. And for the

most part the land was mountainous, a fact that would make waging war manoeuvres difficult.”

Joshua was in need of strength and courage. And – praise God! – when the God calls his people, he gives them what they need. The God first tells Joshua to be strong and courageous on the basis of his covenant. The God tells Joshua, “Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land, I swore to their ancestors to give to them” (v. 6). From generation to generation, God has proven himself faithful in keeping his word. Joshua can be strong and courageous on the basis of God’s unfailing covenant promise. Joshua has experienced God’s faithfulness himself. Joshua witnessed God delivering the Israelites from Egypt and saw first-hand the miracles God performed there. Joshua had also spent the last forty odd years experiencing God’s faithfulness, even after the Israelite nation’s rebellion. Joshua saw God’s miraculous provision of food and water for His people as they wandered through the desert. Joshua saw the column of cloud by day and fire by night that accompanied the Israelites in their desert sojourn that reminded them of God’s abiding presence with them. Joshua could trust God because a lifetime of experience had taught Joshua that God was faithful.

Many commentators believe that verses 7 and 8 make up the centerpoint of this passage and provide the theme for the entire book of Joshua. In between the God’s first call to courage (based on His faithfulness) and the God’s third call to courage (based on the promise of His continuing presence), the second call to courage is different – it is a command. The God tells Joshua, “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it” (v. 8). The Hebrew word for ‘meditate’ (hagah) means, literally, ‘to mutter.’ In Joshua’s day, meditating on God’s word meant speaking it quietly under one’s breath, in order to memorize it. If a person has God’s word continually in their mouth, the mind remembers it, and the heart is transformed. The Hebrew word, *sekel*, which is translated, “successful” also has a common usage, meaning “prudent” or “wise.” Knowing and obeying God’s word will cause Joshua to be successful because it will first of all make him wise

Finally, the God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous on the basis of God's presence. "Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (v. 9) Ultimately, the success of Joshua's leadership – and the welfare of God's people – is dependent on the abiding and guiding presence of God. When the LORD goes with his people, they have all the reason in the world to be strong and courageous. Even in the face of giants.

So how does this passage relate to us here this morning? Well we all, I think experience fear when we are asked to do something new. It is part of our fallen nature to look at situations and see the worst, to only see the giants if you will. And because most of us doubt that we are up to the task set before us. We are not that different from the Israelites when confronted with being asked to do something new, we all tend to fear.

So why does this story relate to us here this morning; because God is calling each of us to serve Him and that service is always full of giants. God's call to serve is never a call to be comfortable; it is always a call to be courageous.

So how do we apply God's words to Joshua to our lives. I think we can use my experience of learning to swim as a form of template for applying God's word to our lives and being strong and taking courage.

So instead of sobbing and desperately holding onto the side of the pool I could have looked at Dad and remember that throughout the weeks of him teaching me to swim he hadn't let me drown. Perhaps I could have remembered that the year before Dad had rescued my sister, brother and myself from the sea when we had got ourselves into trouble and did actually face being drowned. So, for us as for Joshua we could focus on God faithfulness rather than focus on our fears.

So instead of crying like a baby I could have remembered the lessons about how to swim that my dad had so laboriously tried to teach me. Perhaps if I remembered that when I practiced what dad taught me it actually seemed to work, and I managed to swim however badly and briefly. So, for us as for Joshua we could focus on God's word and the fact that it works rather than focus on our fears.

So instead wailing at the top of my lungs “I can’t do this, I’m going to drown” and tightening my grip on the side of the pool perhaps I could have looked and seen my dad standing an arm’s length away ready to rescue me if I got into trouble and realise he would never leave me to flounder or drown because he loved me. So, for us as for Joshua we could focus on God’s presence with us rather than focus on our fears.

So how does this passage relate to us here this morning? It relates to us because we too are called by God to move, but in this case to move not just into a single country but the whole world. Jesus gave a commission to all those who would follow Him. **Matthew 28: 19 – 20** *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* Which is not daunting at all is it? I am sure you would agree that this world is full of giants and fortified cities and fierce warriors more than enough reason to feel real fear. Our passage this morning shows us and Joshua how to overcome fear.

God is faithful

God word

God is with us

I leave you this morning with the promise of Jesus **John 16:33** *“But take heart! I have overcome the world”*.