

... May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and of you, who are ROCK, REDEEMER, and COMFORTER of us all. Amen.

Joshua 1: 5-9 ...Each week we are visiting with a familiar biblical story which invites us to listen and respond with courage, trust, & live with hope. Today the focus is with a well-known character...Joshua, and God's encouraging words for leading God's People.

Joshua is the 6th book in our bible, located just after Deuteronomy. When reading this book, we must remember it is a historical-theological treatise... NOT a factual report. God is the central concern of this book, and Joshua is the central character. It is more like an 'epic narrative' of Israel's entry into the western Highlands of Canaan. So, think of it as a story of Israel acting on God's direction... a new beginning with God and a faithful response to God, who is creator & sustainer of everything everywhere. And, let us remember the character/nature of God is that of a faithful covenant maker and covenant keeper.

As we listen to Joshua, We want to ask, what '*territory*' might God want US (SJUMC) to '*enter and settle*' for GOD's goal of human flourishing in God's forever family?

Joshua was now the leader of God's peoples... all 25,000-30,000 of them. He had been trained under Moses, chosen by Moses, commissioned by Moses and anointed/affirmed by God.

Joshua had been one of the 12 who had been sent by Moses to scout out the land. Only Joshua & Caleb believed the Israelites could be successful in entering Canaan. Fear and disobedience kept Moses & the Israelites from crossing over and prevented Moses from entering the Promised Land.

In these few verses are words of promise & direction, encouragement and comfort from the Lord. Joshua was called to lead the next generation into the Promised Land. ... so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you; Be strong and courageous; being careful to act in accordance with all the law; meditate on it day and night; I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the

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Lord your God is with you wherever you go; promise of presence; trust God; 'love God, love others'; strong & courageous. For the record, remember: Courage is the willingness to do what you know is right even if it makes you afraid.

Again, as we listen to these verses of Joshua, we want to ask, what 'territory' might God want US (SJUMC) to 'enter and settle' for GOD's goal of human flourishing in God's forever family? What is it that God is calling us to, with promise & direction alongside these words of encouragement & comfort?

In times such as we are in... a health pandemic of coronavirus, a moral pandemic of racism...what is it God is calling us to do?

As a faith community, we have responded with protocols and practices to keep one another safe and minimize risk in the health crisis...through phone conferences for bible study, zoom for meetings, developing online worship, and contactless drop offs for the food bank. Even here in the Chapel in the Woods, we minimize risk to one another with face covering & social distancing and limited time spent together. As a faith community, we have responded to the need.

But how are we addressing the need for racial justice and the valuing of all humanity? The responses to the faith & race survey were a quick check in, but it is not a response to the need. Even now, I hear the words of this scripture urging a response to go forth into this new place and settle in. What does this look like?

It looks like reading, listening, having conversation, getting to know different perspectives so that understanding is developed, and the people of God would live and flourish together.

More will come as I wrestle with this calling. I believe this is our 'Joshua' moment...to enter into this movement of racial justice. I invite your prayer for discerning how to respond to the invitation to listen, learn, and grow as a disciple, inviting others into God's family, and deepening an understanding of the family of God. Let's pray...

Lord, there are so many times when I feel afraid. In my fear, help me not to stray from your path, but, rather, to walk in it each day. Help me to find strength and courage by trusting you are with me...now and always. Amen.