

People of God,

When I arrived in Edmonton 13 years ago, the church was just on the brink of making some big decisions which we hoped and prayed would lead to beautiful changes. Over the next few years, we added to this building and the number of people coming to worship each Sunday started to increase. Most notably in my memory is the change in size of the group coming up for children's messages on Sunday morning. 13 years ago, that was between 5 and 10 kids. Just prior to covid, we had at least 40 and sometimes many more and we're close to that number again. It has been such a blessing to see the congregation grow.

Most remarkable to me is the large number of people here who weathered the storm. What people who came here over the past 6 or 7 years might not realize is that there is a core group of people who have always been here. I think of people like Bert & Ria Grimmon who have both left us for heaven in the past 2 months. I think of Cor Schuring who, likewise, went to the Lord three weeks ago today. That group includes many of you here this morning who are still very much alive. Some have been here your whole life. Some since day one when this church started 55 years ago. Some have come later but you've been here through some good times and some leaner times.

My point is that churches—just like each of us personally or as families—can go through highs and lows. A typical CRC like this one had a period of growth through the 60s and 70s and into the 80s that was very exciting. People packed the pews on Sundays. Couples got married here regularly. Babies came next. Young people crammed together in the back pews. They had large gatherings on Sunday nights. Excitement abounded along with some challenges. However, internal growth slowed down over the next decades and church membership declined.

Many of you lived through that time. You persevered. It wasn't always easy. Some of you may have considered leaving but you didn't. You prayed. You worked hard. You gave generously to help this church. And you **were** still here when things started to improve. You endured the hard times which makes the good times even sweeter.

As Joshua and the people of Israel stood on the edge of the Promised Land, they were a congregation that had weathered the storm—40 years in the wilderness. They'd been tested and failed. Tested again and passed. Tested over and over, always reminded that their job was to trust the Lord's leading. So now at the edge of their soon to be homeland, the Lord tells them through Joshua,

Josh 1:5 No one will be able to stand up 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.

As Trinity Church, we're in a period of change and transition again. Today is Pastor Hilary's last Sunday with us as she prepares to go on maternity leave for

the next year. She's served with us over 9 years. We lost Pastor Michael 6 months ago after 5 years together. Our search committees are now working. We've got Edmund helping out in the interim. That all creates some uncertainty as we move ahead. Yet, just as the Lord had **work** for Israel to do as they transitioned from Pastor Moses to Pastor Joshua, the Lord still has work for us to do. None of these changes are unknown by our God. We can—and we must—move forward under the certainty of God's promise to be with us as a church. And when we get that straight, we'll be able to be strong and courageous, as the Lord says to Israel at the end of our chapter.

That's true for us personally too. The Lord has providentially arranged for some of us to undergo struggles this year that we aren't counting on. Five years ago it was my family's turn when our daughter Rachel had that brain bleed and almost died. These past months and weeks have been an incredibly heavy time for the Schuring family and the Grimmon family. Or think of someone like Tina Ruiters and all the changes she's had to face in the past couple years—diagnosed with Parkinsons, then losing her husband, three different surgeries with months in the hospital or rehab, losing her mobility and now having to move into nursing care. None of us has a trouble-free life. But God covenants to be with us in the changes and challenges. We can trust that he's at work in us and through our lives, even when we don't fully understand his ways.

The opening chapter of the book of Joshua, just like the closing one, has what is called a hortatory tone. It's a call from God to listen closely. And in this case he's saying, "Trust Me as the Lord of your life as you move ahead. Trust me to lead you to where you need to be."

So, this morning, lets lean into that, seeking to trust that the Lord leads.

I. The Lord Leads

When road construction crews set out to build a new road, they do so from a pre-approved plan or blueprint. They don't just start bulldozing however they desire. No, years of thought and planning have been done before one clump of dirt turns over. City planners look at traffic patterns, designers or architects draft proposals, engineers like Hilary's husband Matthias determine what kind of bridges might be needed to cross waterways or train tracks or other roads.

That kind of planning pales in comparison to the plans of God for his people. On a much grander scale, the God of Joshua has an awesome plan for Israel as they head into the Promised Land. He will soon open the Jordan River to allow his people to pass through it. He'll lead them in the victory over Jericho as they obediently march around the city, give a shout and watch the walls crash down before their eyes. The Lord's plan for his chosen people all throughout history grows out of his covenant promise to be our God and to bring all nations to himself. He works out every intricate detail and at the same time calls us to faithfully respond to his promise. That's why if we want to enjoy the fullness of life with our God, we, like Israel of old, must heed his call in Joshua 1.

However, it's important to start by listening to what he tells us about himself. We tend to be a society of doers. Our identity is wrapped up in what we do. One of the first questions we ask people we've just met is "What kind of work do you do?"

But in Joshua 1 we are steered away from ourselves and from what we need to do, first of all. That hortatory call reminds us not to be so focused on what we have to do or what we'll have to get through; instead, we need to get focused on our all-powerful and all-knowing, gracious covenant God. He's the one who will get us through whatever comes our way now and forever. He is the planner of our life. He's the designer and architect of our life. He's the engineer of our life. He's the heavy equipment operator. He is the one paving the highway for us into the future. And getting there is often a process, a God-ordained process.

So the better we know our covenant God, the better we'll face the challenges that await us.

As part of a capitalist society, we are taught, at least indirectly, to take charge of our lives and to look out for number one—for self. That drives people to do a lot of things, even good things. But the Lord is calling us to do something different. We're called to follow his leading. Follow him.

You don't see that real obviously in our text but it's there. Listen to the opening words:

Josh 1:1 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.

You see, the Lord is in charge! So, what is Moses? He is the servant of the Lord! God calls the shots for Moses. And when the leadership changes to Joshua, we see that Joshua takes his directions from the Lord as well. God says, "*get ready to cross the Jordan River...*" And Joshua complies as do the people. Both Moses and Joshua, these two well-known leaders of God's people, go forward as the Lord directs. They heed the word of the Lord. They don't come up with great ideas, start working on them and then ask God to bless what they've started doing. They are God's servants. They do as God instructs. And they can lead the people of God only because they themselves are led by the Lord. As they submit their life to the Lord, he directs their steps.

You see, dear friends, our place as God's people is not to tell him what he must do for us. Nor to beg him to come on side with our plans. It's nice to think that we have God at our beckon call in the sense that he is our servant to do for us whatever we ask—like a genie who grants us our wishes. But who are we, dear people, that we could be so misguided and so filled with thoughts of our own grandeur that we would even entertain the idea of God being our servant?

Now it is true that Jesus came to serve us. Indeed, he did. Jesus is the NT Joshua, the Saviour who leads us into the Promised Land of God's grace and his

kingdom. The Apostle Paul tells us very clearly about the servanthood of Jesus in Philippians 2:7 when he explains that Jesus

Php 2:7 ...made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

He gave up the glories of heaven to serve us. That was him following the plan of God for the greater goal of bringing glory to the Father by saving us from our sins. As Jesus himself tells the Father in heaven in his prayer of John 17,

Jn 17:4 I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

That is the focus we need to take with us from Jesus, as from the Moses and Joshua. Living for the glory of the Father is another way of saying that we live to serve him, just as Jesus did, rather than to be served by him.

Jesus shows us that trusting the Father in heaven to lead us is the only way to live life to the fullest. We might not know through which hills and valleys the road of life will take us but the God who miraculously brought Israel out of Egypt and who is about to lead them in the conquest of the Promised Land under the leadership of the OT Joshua shows us that he's worthy to be trusted. Trusting in the Lord's leading as his servants will be better for us than following our own lead.

II. The Lord Provides

Here's why. Secondly, we see that **when** the Lord leads, the Lord also provides. The Lord is the giver of all we need to fulfill his plan for our lives. As we tune in to the story unfolding in Joshua 1, we hear the Lord saying,

Josh 1:2 "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.

That's quite the promise. We maybe don't realize it but it was kind of like saying to the people of a small place like Gibbons, "You go and cross the Edmonton city line and I will give that place to you." The difference in strength and size is huge, not to mention Israel's obvious disadvantage in technology. The Israelites were the weaklings coming into the Promised Land. The Canaanites had developed metal and steel. They had body armour for protection and swords and spears with steel points and blades. The Israelites had sticks and stones. But the Lord gave them his promise to give them the land which meant he'd be giving them the victory over the vast territory described in v.4 as well.

Dr. Martin Woudstra, formerly of Calvin Seminary and an uncle to a few people here this morning, writes about the Jordan River. "*Prepare to cross the Jordan*. This was a formidable command, and everybody acquainted with the local geography... would have understood it so. The river Jordan had a separating rather than a connecting function, running through a deep gorge which (some call) the earth's deepest valley... The slopes are generally steep and sudden, sometimes forming huge precipices." Add to that description of the Jordan itself the fact that chapter 3:15&16 talks about high water levels as the people come to the Jordan.

Josh 3:15 Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, ¹⁶ the water from upstream stopped flowing.

Just mentioning to the Israelites that they must cross the Jordan is itself a sign to the people that God must go ahead of them and that the victory over the enemies on the other side will only be achieved if God gives it to them. And give it he does. God provides. The water stops and the people march through the river bed. Bit by bit, step by step the Lord gives them the Land. Steep climbs and huge obstacles are no issue and when Israel stands face to face against the Canaanite armies, they will know that God provides.

There's a little lesson there for us too. We might think God should do some things differently. May do them a lot quicker than he does. We might think that the Lord has waited long enough before returning. We might think people have suffered long enough in this world. But God is the one who decides because he holds the blueprint for the world and our lives. He provides all things necessary for body and soul in his way and time. He will give us all that is needed for us to accomplish what he has in mind.

That's why we need to get close to him. And stay close. We need to really, truly, and consciously learn to trust him as the provider of all we need by getting to know him better. Getting to know personally that he is completely trustworthy and faithful.

Israel had to first trust and see God's provision at the Jordan. That was just step one. Then they'd have to trust him even more when they saw the armies and fortresses of Canaan, like the walled city of Jericho.

We can easily be overwhelmed by the challenges the Lord puts before us. But be assured he puts them before us. We are not called to sit around in this world aimlessly. We might struggle with some of the day to day details of our lives but we always know that God calls us to live for his glory as citizens of his kingdom in this world. God has a clearly revealed plan for us already to march forward with his agenda in this world.

We don't face the Hittites or any of those Canaanite peoples but we face the world today. We face the spirit of the age in which we live. We face the tide of secularism, the pull of pleasure and entertainment as the goal of people's life, we face the culture which teaches our children that there is no absolute truth and, if there's a heaven, all roads lead there. We face the onslaught of philosophies that want us to be the masters of our own destiny, people who find our identity in things other than Christ. Those are just some of the enemies of Christ we know we will face today, whether as adults or teens or children.

And in Christ's strength we can face them. We are citizens of the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ is our Joshua leading us in the battle against the foes of God. Step by step, day by day. We don't get to see the big picture in advance. We simply seek to honour God with each step we take. However, the victorious

outcome has already been sealed through Christ's victory over sin and death and hell. Because of what he's done and his presence with us today, we can be strong and courageous. One day all the powers and principalities of darkness will bow before Jesus. In Philippians 2, Paul writes about the victorious Christ when he says,

*Php 2:10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
2:11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

Similarly, those who face unknown challenges like the death of a loved one or even our own death or sickness or other uncertainties in business, family or anything else have the promise of God to watch over them and give them all they need to face the enemy in the certainty of eternal victory. Death does not have the last word for us. Christ does. Nothing, says Paul, can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. He is the victor and he will lead us and provide all we need.

Just like those who persevered through the years of decline and uncertainty in this church some years ago now, so today there's much we don't know about the future. But let us hold together, let us move forward just as the tribes of Israel were called to work together. Let us follow the Lord into the glorious future he has prepared. Let us learn more and more to step out in faith that does what God says. We may not be able to figure out how God will get us across the "Jordan Rivers" of our lives but he will because Jesus goes ahead of us. As God was with Moses and Joshua, so he will be with us. And we need to remember his words to his servants of long ago:

Josh 1:5 No one will be able to stand up 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

We're in good hands with our Lord Jesus leading the way and providing for us.