



YOUNG ADULT SUNDAY

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

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Lection – Joshua 1:1-9 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 1) After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, (v. 2) "My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites (v. 3). Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. (v. 4) From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. (v. 5) No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. (v. 6) Be strong

and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. (v. 7) 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. (v. 8) This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. (v. 9) I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

In the Black Church, more often than not, young adults are just waiting their turn to be able to use the gifts and talents given them by the Creator in the Church and world community. Young adults often challenge middle-age and older adults to think differently and more deeply about our traditions and values and what really matters. On this Sunday, we affirm our young adults (persons 18-35 in some quarters of the Black community and 18-40 in others) as we focus our attention on the present and future generation of leaders.

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Joshua 1:1-9

Part One: The Contemporary Context of the Interpreter

In terms of helping with discipline, providing nurturing, and especially with sustaining individuals to cope with life’s harsh realities in society, the African American Church has been a signal agent for good. Older adults have come to appreciate the fact that many of their childhood songs, those long-metered hymns, were significant pieces of a template; a template which also included much prayer, preaching, worship and fellowship as important aspects of spiritual formation. Many of those experiences would prepare each of us for the leadership roles in which we would find ourselves. Like Joshua, the new leadership began with preparation, with the willingness to be faithful followers who looked, listened and learned from those who came before us. This is still the template for young adults.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

Our text today is found in the first book following the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses. The book of Joshua could be considered the second part of Moses’ ministry, even though Moses is no longer on the scene. In his commentary on Joshua, A. Graeme Auld, says “Continuity is the keynote of this opening passage of Joshua and this continuity has two main aspects. It reports a smooth succession from Moses to Joshua. And it is easy to demonstrate how smoothly the Book of Joshua itself picks up and follows on from the book of Deuteronomy.”¹ God charges Joshua to complete the work of His servant Moses who is now dead (v. 1).

It is apparent in this passage that God knows that Joshua is completely ready to lead. However, God wants Joshua to know and to understand the uniqueness of this new leadership role. In this passage, Moses is identified as “**the servant**” of God. It is no minor consequence that this idea comes at the beginning of the chapter. This view echoes the words of Jesus who said, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your **servant**” (Mark 10:43, 44; Matt.20:25-28). Christian leadership finds its distinctive pattern and its foundation in the servant leadership model. This is also part of the young adult leadership template.

In addition to servanthood, a second theme found in this passage is that of apprenticeship. Joshua is called Moses’ assistant, which suggests that Joshua had spent time as an apprentice learning from his leader, Moses. It was Joshua who accompanied Moses to Mount Sinai when God gave him the stone tablets containing Ten Commandments (Exodus 24:13; 32:17). Joshua was present with Moses during his most intimate moments with God. “Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then he would return to the camp; but his young assistant, Joshua son of Nun, would not leave the tent” (Exodus 33:11). Joshua was one of 12 men sent out by Moses to spy out the Promised Land, and he was one of two that came back with a positive report believing that God would grant them victory over their enemies (Numbers 14:5-9). As Moses’ assistant, he had been faithful and obedient, one who could be entrusted with great responsibility. Today’s young adults can be the leaders we need them to be if the Church and the community continue to make apprenticeship opportunities readily available for them. Today, we call such apprenticeship opportunities mentorship. By any name, this theme represents the obligation that older adults have to provide training, wisdom, opportunities and prayer for those who are to come after them.

Yet a third theme of this passage is God’s faithfulness. “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you” (v. 5). Joshua enters into the same covenant promise reminiscent of the promise God made to Abraham. (Genesis 12:1-3). There is a seamless flow of God’s eternal plan of redemption, from one generation to the next, from one leader to the next. Too often, after a long-time and/or a powerful and successful leader exits we waste time bemoaning their absence or attempt to remold the next leader in the former leader’s image. This is unhelpful and not biblical. God is with all leaders whom God calls. Today’s young adults are ready to step onto and lead from the stages where God has placed them. This is their moment and by supporting them and following them we are supporting God’s continual unfolding of his plan for humanity.

The final word given to Joshua in this passage is the same word God gave his faithful servant Moses. “Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread..., because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6). More than ever, we need young adult leaders with courage and boldness, not leaders driven by polls and personal gain who are afraid to shake up the status quo. Just as they did in the 1950s and 1960s, today’s young adults are needed to stand boldly and resolutely against

today's giants (corporate greed, corrupt politics, public apathy, ignorance and war) that threaten to devour us all. The Lord has no need of coward soldiers.

Also, young adults must recognize, as did Joshua, the true source of their strength. Joshua was told by God to, "... act in accordance with all the laws 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" (v. 6). An effective new generation of young adult leaders will remain faithful to the tried and true methods of obedience and submitted humility to God and the unchanging Word of God. If they follow this formula our future is in capable hands.

Celebration

In spite of challenges we face today with what seems to be a shortage of bold, authentic and moral leaders, we have been blessed with many gifted and talented young adults who are standing at the threshold, some waiting to blaze trails and others have jumped right in and begun important movements. God's faithfulness is not in short supply and he will continue to raise up young adult leaders who understand their divine call to act as servant leaders for the good of humanity. We are not deceived; God is still faithful and God has a royal host of young adults who are not only ready to lead but able to lead. Thanks be to God.

III. Descriptive Details

The descriptive details in this passage include:

Sounds: The Lord speaking to Joshua; jubilation and hesitation as the church and community anticipate what this new and exciting leadership has in store;

Sights: Having every inch of ground upon which one stands given to them; the wilderness, the great rivers including the Euphrates; prayer warriors kneeling before God's thrones praying for young adults to be strong and courageous as they fulfill the task before them; and

Smells: The refreshing springtime breeze of budding flowers denoting a liberating spirit in the air.

Notes

1. Graeme Auld. Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, the Daily Study Bible Series. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1984. p. 5.