

Faith Alive In The Home – Stay Strong – April 25th, 2021. Joshua 1:1-3,5-9.

Have you ever got lost?

Perhaps you have taken a walk in a forest, and somehow got disorientated, to the point that you weren't quite sure of how to get out.

Or perhaps you have visited a new place, a new town maybe, where you were unfamiliar with the landmarks around you, and you began to have a foreboding sense that you were lost.

Or maybe, like my husband, you get lost in a parking lot – not sure which way to turn – that's if you can even find your parked car!

I suspect that we have all got lost at some point.

And how did it make you feel? Did you become a little anxious? Did you panic a little? Did you think that you will never be able to find your way out of the forest, never be able to reach safety again?

It's a strange feeling isn't it – when we are uncertain of the way forward. That sense of being lost and hopeless can become overwhelming. We can easily spiral down into despair.

If you comb the internet, there are so many stories of unbelievable survival of people lost in forests, in deserts, on mountain peaks, and at sea. Many of them have become bestselling novels, or even made into movies. And in almost each case, when the survivor tells their story, despite all their experience as a climber, a trekker, or a sailor – they almost all admit that there was a point, when they just had to trust that a power bigger than themselves, would carry them through to safety.

That's the message that I hear in our scripture today.

The Israelites have been landless wanderers of the desert for 40 years. Although they were people of faith, we know from our ancient stories that there were certainly times when they felt lost. Times when they were literally crying out for food and water.

And now, when their leader, Moses dies, it must be like the last straw for them. All hope is gone; they feel lost, they feel abandoned, and they begin to spiral down into despair.

You can imagine them complaining amongst themselves, asking:
Has God deserted us? Are we being left to die? Where is God now?

But amid this dark and desperate time, God chooses to speak to them through Joshua, reassuring them with the promise:

“I will never leave you or forsake you ... I will be with you wherever you go.”(v.5, 9)

And just to make sure that they understand the comfort and reassurance of this promise, and how it will carry them through all difficult times ahead, God tells them: *“Be Strong and Courageous”*.

And God doesn't just say it once, but repeats it three times within this short passage of scripture: *“Be Strong and Courageous”*(v.6, 7, & 9)

These days of lockdown, when we are in the middle of a third wave of the pandemic, and with news of a possible forth wave on the horizon – it may feel like we are in a desert.

Our desert is not one of wandering on an open plain, but it is one where we are confined within the four walls of our homes.

Thirsty not for food and water, but for human touch and contact.

It is a desert where we can not reach out to physically hug those that are grieving the loss of loved ones.

It is a desert where we cannot see or hold a new grandchild in joyous celebration.

It is a desert where we cannot visit a friend that is sick in hospital.

It is a desert where we can not gather with our extended family around the dinner table, or celebrate milestone birthdays and anniversaries.

It is a desert where we cannot physically share an evening of fun and laughter with friends around the campfire or Bar B Q.

It is a desert when we are without employment or income with mounting bills to pay.

It is a desert where we cannot gather together to worship in our beloved sanctuary.

And, perhaps, like the Israelites you are beginning to call out in despair and in pandemic weariness: Has God deserted us? Where is God now?

But, like the Israelites, let us take reassurance from those words of God:

“I will never leave you or forsake you.”

When we begin to ask ourselves – ‘How much longer?’ ‘When will this end?’ ‘When can we gather again?’

In those times of rising anxiety, I invite you to speak aloud the mantra from God. Say it with me now:

“I will never leave you or forsake you.”

“I will never leave you or forsake you.”

“I will never leave you or forsake you.”

God’s promise to be with the Israelites is a promise for us too. Whether your image of God is one of the Divine looking down on us, or one of God being present in your heart – take comfort that God is with you.

With the reassurance of this promise the Israelites had the courage to move forward and become the landed people of Israel – and if you don’t know the story, I encourage you to read the book of Joshua. It’s important to note too, that the Israelites didn’t move back to the way things were 40 years earlier – they moved forward to a new land.

We too will move forward.

There will be a time when we will be able to touch, to hug, to gather and to smile without masks.

But it will also be a new time, because we will all have travelled a journey that has the potential to renew our faith.

We will all have experienced the reassurance of knowing that even when we were in the desert of our homes – God was with us.

And so, I invite you to seek ways to intentionally keep ‘faith - alive - in – your-homes.’ F.A.I.T.H.

Pray, meditate, read a book, read the book of Joshua, walk with God in the environment, call a friend, reach out through zoom.

And every day repeat aloud the mantra from God:

“I will never leave you or forsake you.”

“I will never leave you or forsake you.”

“I will never leave you or forsake you.”

I encourage you, my friends, to *“Be Strong and Courageous.”* In faith - Amen.