

Worship at home
September 12, 2021



God calls us to worship:

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.

Know that the LORD is God.
It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness endures to all generations.¹

We bring our praise and confessions:

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home;
We gather on this first day of the week
at the beginning of a new season of school and activities,
to worship you.
You have been faithful to your people throughout the generations.
You promised Abraham his descendants would live in a new Eden,
in a land wherein they could be free to worship you,
and enjoy the life of eternal quality that is fellowship with you.
Through the ministry of Joshua,
you fulfilled that promise,

¹ Psalm 100

and proved your word is trustworthy.
You promise that anyone who turns to you
in faith and repentance,
trusting your promise and your grace,
will enjoy that life of eternal quality that is fellowship with you.
As we prepare ourselves to hear again your words
recorded in Scripture,
remind us of your promises,
remind us of your faithfulness,
and rekindle in us the desire to love and serve you,
to live lives holy to you,
so that all who know us,
will know you,
and will know that you are the one in whom is peace for our souls
and peace for the world.
Amen.

God assures us of his forgiveness:

From now on, St. Paul declared, we regard no one from a human point of view.
If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.
Everything old has passed away; and everything has become new.
Through Christ God has reconciled us and given us a ministry of reconciliation.
Thanks be to God that we can all make a new start, this day and every day!

**In response to the gospel,
we confess our faith and offer our lives and resources:**

Please remember to prayerfully make your offerings to the congregation of which you are most associated. If you're a member/adherent of Knox-Moore or St. Andrew's, Mooretown, please send your offering to Howard McKellar or Judy Armstrong.

Hymn: #407 "Praise my soul, the King of Heaven"

God speaks to us through his Word:

God of wisdom, you have taught us that we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from you. Send us your Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts to receive your Word, speaking through the scriptures. Strengthen us to live that Word as our daily bread. Amen.

Today we begin a new series of sermons which will take us to the beginning of Advent on November 28th. We are on the cusp of a new season. September brings the hope of fall. Harvest. Apple pies. Pumpkins. The reassuring feeling you get looking at a full wood shed or equivalent. September brings the hope of a new school year. The hope of new beginning. As I was thinking what to preach during this season, I was drawn to the Old Testament book of Joshua. Which does not, incidentally, have much to do with apple pies, pumpkins, and piles of firewood. However, it does have to do with the hope of promises fulfilled and a future full of abundant harvests, although yet unknown.

Joshua tells a version of the story of Israel's entrance into and settlement in the Promised Land. It is a story of transition and hope. It's a story of God's faithfulness and new beginnings for his people.

Joshua is also a difficult story. It deals with things like divinely-supported war, invasion, conquering people groups.

It's a story about learning to be holy to the Lord while living among many other faiths, customs, and practices.

With that as an introduction, I invite you to hear the words of God as recorded for us in Joshua, chapter 1.

READ JOSHUA 1:1-18.

1. After 40 years of nomadic wilderness living, the Israelites were camped on the eastern shore of the Jordan River. Forty years after God delivered them from Egyptian slavery, and 620 years after God made his initial promise to Abraham, the Israelites could see the beginnings of the fulfillment of that promise. The end of their slavery, the end of their travels, the beginning of their rest was near!

There was, however, one complication. The Promised Land was already inhabited.

When we talk about the Promised Land, we talk about the area between the western bank of the Jordan River and the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea as well as areas east of the Jordan River. The territory is known generally as Canaan and its inhabitants the Canaanites. However, like assuming Canada is a homogenous entity, Canaan was not descriptive of a homogenous population. There were at least 10 people groups who called this area home. They had their own languages, their own faiths and religious practices; they already had a pretty sophisticated system of commerce and technology, arts and philosophy.

They were well established. And people who know more of this history than I recognize their influence in much of what we have, how we think, and what we do today.

Joshua's task was to lead the people of Israel in battle against these current residents and then, having conquered them, divide their land and assign it to the twelve tribes of Israel.

That is how the book of Joshua tells the story.

Other Biblical references suggest that the Israelite settlement proceeded in a softer manner. Also, the currently existing archeological evidence for Joshua's version of the story, is slim.

Nevertheless, their plan was to cross the Jordan, take Jericho first and thus secure the center of Canaan. Then they would move south in their second campaign and their final campaign would be into the northern areas.

When Moses was still alive, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half of Manasseh liked the territory on the eastern shores of the Jordan (they had considerable herds of cattle and the land there was well-suited for grazing), so, they asked Moses for land allocations "beyond the Jordan" and were granted them. Because the People of God were to remain united in their efforts to secure the whole of the Promised Land, although the women, children, and livestock could set to the work of settling their lands east of the Jordan, the men who could fight were to cross the river with the rest of Israel.

And this is what they were preparing to do at the beginning of Joshua:

Prepare your provisions; for in three days you are to cross over the Jordan, to go in to take possession of the land that the LORD your God gives you to possess.²

2. In chapter 1 we're introduced to some of the major themes in the book.
 - (i) God will go with Israel in battle against the Canaanites and they will be victorious.
 - (ii) Joshua's (and Israel's) faithfulness will be rewarded with political, military, and even agricultural and financial success.
 - (iii) With God on Israel's side, the Canaanites and their morals and their religion, will be utterly destroyed.

These notions are going to be offensive to many 21st century listeners.

Why would the God who urged people to turn their spears into ploughshares and pronounced a special blessing on peacemakers, sanction war, and war which borders on genocide?

Does the God who said "Blessed are the poor" and who advocates for the orphans, widows, and outsider really reward faithfulness with success and prosperity?

And, particularly for Canadian Christians of European descent coming to terms with our missionary and colonial history, the book of Joshua seems to give divine assent to the annihilation of the culture and religion of the current residents by the settlers!

And yet, the book is a significant part of our sacred cannon.

So, what do we do with books like Joshua?

I think there are three important ways Christians often read and engage with books like Joshua:

1. Take it as a direct command from God and seek to obey it word-for-word. Such an approach might lead one to espouse things like holy war/just war, the prosperity gospel, and colonialism and genocide.
2. Ignore it altogether. Assume that it's just too offensive for our context, or, assume that it's not relevant since the advent of Jesus.

² Joshua 1:11

3. Hold fast to the conviction that the God we know in Jesus of Nazareth is the same God who spoke creation into being, delivered Israel from slavery, and put them in possession of the Promised Land; and, holding fast to this conviction accept that the entirety of Scripture is God's Word to us and that there are lessons the Spirit needs the church to learn through the records of Joshua.

My bias tends to be weighted towards the latter approach.

As we move into this series, I will not promise that I will satisfactorily answer any of these big questions. I probably won't. However, what I hope to encourage all of us to do is to take seriously God's Word, even when it offends us, and take seriously our present context, and open ourselves to the teaching of the Holy Spirit who alone can illuminate for us the lessons contained therein.

This is neither an easy exercise nor a quick one. Nor is it one that I can do for you. But I hope you will join me as I walk through these questions and others that may arise over the next few months.

3. To get us started on this journey, it behooves us to reflect a little on what it means to be put in possession of the land.

To do so, one has to recognize that the only person with any right to give away land is the one who owns the land. And the only one who truly owns any land is the One who created the land.

Everything belongs to God. Human ownership is best understood as stewardship of a legacy, of an inheritance.

Regardless of their remarkable technological, scientific, linguistic, and artistic innovations, the people who were inhabiting the land from the time God first made the promise to Abraham (cf. Genesis 15:16), did not recognize Yahweh as Creator and God. They led lives and encouraged worship practices that did not honour Yahweh nor promote his version of morality. They probably didn't see themselves as particularly sinful. Their ethics and morality, their business practices and religious observances were different from those of the People of the Covenant. But they probably didn't identify as sinners! Nevertheless, from the perspective of the Biblical imagination, they

did not have a lasting claim to the land because they did not recognize the Creating God as God.

So, what we see happening through Israel and by the leadership of Joshua, is the Living God of Creation and Covenant reclaiming a portion of His creation.

This is God's promise to humanity; this is salvation:

that God will reclaim what is His and enable us to live in a place in which we can enjoy fellowship with the One in whom we live, move, and have our being.

When Jesus went to the cross, he passed through *a type* of Jordan River on behalf of the entire human race in every age. He went to fight in our place against the ultimate enemy of God: sin, death, and the devil.

What Joshua was commissioned to do in a small part of God's world, Jesus has done for the entirety of the human race.

Jesus has reclaimed humanity from all that excludes us from God's presence.

Thus, Jesus has affirmed the goodness of creation – including people – and that every square inch of it belongs to God.

So, no matter where we live, our heavenly Father desires that we enjoy the benefits of the Promised Land which have been secured for all of humanity by Jesus the Son of God.

4. Wherever we are, we are on God's land. In Jesus the Christ, the Father invites us to joy in fellowship with Him where we are. And, by the teaching and promptings of the Holy Spirit speaking through the Scriptures, to steward the land, our own lives, and our relationships in such a way that all of creation continues to bring God's blessings to all life forms.

Onward, then, and fear not,
children of the day,
for God's word shall never,
never pass away.³

³ "Standing at the portal", Frances Ridley Havergal

Hymn #811 “Standing at the portal”

We respond with prayer, faith, and service:

God of inspiration and imagination, you are the artist of our lives.
You have filled your world with gifts,
expressed through the creativity and dedication of so many.
We give you thanks for a new season of opportunity
to gather together again and share gifts that have lain in wait
for months of isolation and uncertainty.

Response: One: Artist of our lives,
All: Awaken our gifts again to serve you.

Today we give you thanks for the artists among us,
emerging from time in solitude and reflection:
Thank you for painters and poets,
for lines on a canvas and lines on a page,
which inspire us and leave us wondering.
Thank you for sculptors and storytellers
who fashion faces in stone and scenes in words
to outline the profile of your truth for us.

Response: One: Artist of our lives,
All: Awaken our gifts again to serve you.

God of grace and goodness,
We know your creativity in the arts of fabric and foodstuff,
and in hands that work with wood and keep machinery humming.
We give you thanks for those who stitch patterns with thread
and those who set patterns on our plates, mixing colours and flavours.
Thank you for those who build and repair, refinish and restore
the things we need and the things we cherish.

Response: One: Artist of our lives,
All: Awaken our gifts again to serve you.

God of music and movement,
We know your beauty in the gifts of keyboard and composer,
in the blending of voices and the bending of dancers.
We thank you for these sounds and sights
that can touch our hearts once more,
and open our souls to praise you.

Response: One: Artist of our lives,
All: Awaken our gifts again to serve you.

God of hope and healing,
We thank you, too, for the healing arts,
for the care and relief offered by professionals throughout our health-care system
and for support given to those who suffer by friends and volunteers.
We pray for all who seek healing—
those anticipating or recovering from surgery.
those living with pain or illness,
those struggling with grief and loss,
those who bear anxiety, depression or dementia,
and other conditions which trouble mind and body.
Give each one your presence and peace
through our prayer and friendship.
Reach out through us to bring aid and advocacy
to the most vulnerable of your creatures.
We sum up all our prayers, silent and spoken, in the words Jesus taught us:⁴

The Lord's Prayer

God sends us with His blessing:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. Amen.

⁴ From worship resource for September 12, 2021 available at: <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>