

## Holidays!

- *(image: "holiday" text on sand)*
- Have you booked your summer holidays yet?
- Where are you going?
- Somewhere exotic? hot? tranquil?
  
- Before you are able to enjoy your holiday, you've got to get ready and get there.

### Packing!

- *(image: suitcase)*
- What do we need to take? Where did we put the.....? Have we forgotten anything?
- So much for a relaxing start to your break!
  
- All much worse when you are going to somewhere new, somewhere you don't know - unsure about.
  - *(image: question mark symbol)*
- Perhaps you are also having to do something new - go on a ferry, through the Channel Tunnel, on a plane.... for the first time.
- The unknown - it can be scary, nerve-wracking, stressful.
  - even when tied up with something good like a holiday!

## Joshua & God's People

- For those of us who grew up in the church, with a heritage of Sunday School, elements of the story of the beginning of the the people's conquest of the land are very familiar:
  - **crossing the Jordan** - river parting to let people cross
  - **the walls of Jericho** - marching round, blowing trumpets, walls falling down...
  - **the failure at Ai** because someone in the camp had failed to remain pure and had stolen things from Jericho
  - **the on-going campaign to conquer the land.**
- Behind all that familiarity were a group of people stepping out into the **unknown**:
  - **new land**;
  - facing a **new people** - with an unknown ability to fight;
  - change in their own role - **from nomads to invaders.**
- **There on the banks of the Jordan, God asked them - Joshua and people alike - to pack up and get ready to go.**
  
- Can you begin to imagine what they might have felt?
  - **fear; doubt; uncertainty; excitement; challenge; ....**
- All of these, and probably more!

## Our Task and Feelings

- I identify with a lot of that as we stand at the brink of a new year:
  - for us as a congregation
  - and for myself as minister
  - **fear; doubt; uncertainty; excitement; challenge; ....**
- *(image: Challenges and Opportunities montage)*
  
- Community Action Team, cafe - the unknown, the scary...
- Alpha, community outreach - the responsibility, the struggle
- New folk around at worship, at JAM - excitement, challenge
  - we should be daunted by the enormity of the task
  - we should be all too aware it is not a future challenge, something we can put off into the future, but a current reality - people in Fintry now face a lost eternity!

## God's promise to Joshua

- Its at that point that God's promise burns bright from this chapter!
- **"I will be with you.... I will not drop you!"** - literal rendering of end of v.5!
  - *(image: father throwing son into air...)*

- a father with his child, maybe at the chute in the play-park... "I won't drop you!"
- I will be with you
- Full stop. End of story. That's it. No need for doubt or uncertainty, of this at least.
  - "I will be with you."
- And its on that basis - the basis of God's personal, powerful presence with Joshua, that he is encouraged and commanded to:
  - *"Be strong and courageous - be strong and very courageous!"* (v.6,7,9,18)
- *(image: Be strong and very courageous - stand-out figure)*
- He is to be strong, but:
  - not because he is able in himself;
  - not because his training of itself is enough for the task;
  - not because the people, fully armed and in their thousands, were able to conquer the land;
  - not because he is the appointed heir to the great, loved and respected Moses.
- None of those things were adequate for the task.
- **Only God's presence made the task a possible one.**
- Only His promise made Joshua's command of the people to pack up and get ready to advance anything other than madness
- For me, facing the task and responsibility of leading God's people here in Fintry, my confidence can only be in God's promise of his presence
  - not because I can preach
  - not because I have led children's camps and holiday clubs in the past, or can speak to the children in assemblies at the schools
  - not because of the training that I've been through, essential though that has been;
  - not because of all I've done in the past;
  - not because I might have come well recommended (even if I did!);
  - not because this congregation is filled to overflowing with Christian warriors of great faith and courage!
- Only because God is with me, and I have been reminded of that key fact in preparing for this morning.

## **Battle/Mission**

- All of that was not simply true for Joshua alone, as if he was some kind of special case as the people headed down towards the Jordan...
- That promise of God's presence as the only firm ground for going forward was as true for the **whole people**
- Three things about the task that God's people were set:

### **It was God's task**

- *(image: It is God's task)*
- His command - a land the people didn't know;
  - their forefathers had wanted to go back to Egypt, for they didn't know this land;
  - later, their fathers had heard of the great strength of the people of the land, and turned back - only Caleb and Joshua himself survived from that generation to see the land for themselves.
- God had promised them a land - good - but a land of his choosing, not their own.
- Same for us - we have a task - to take the good news of Jesus Christ to others, to friends, neighbours, family, to our community.
- Often not a task we like - shy away from confronting people with the reality of their situation.
- Yet it is God's task, his calling - to share his immense love, his vast mercy, his great love with those around us, just as he has shared it with us.

**It was to be done God's way**

- *(image: Done God's way)*
- *"Be careful to obey all the law...." (v.7)*
- Not just God's task - but to be performed God's way, according to his Word.
- Witness what happened at Ai - Achan took plunder from Jericho that he shouldn't have, then lied about it - and the whole people were defeated.
- God's task - God's way - no stealing, no dishonesty...
  
- Same needs to be true of us - faithful to Scripture as we take on that Mission.
- Being careful not to "bribe" or "brow-beat" people to faith:
  - no prosperity gospel - all problems solved, money available, etc.
  - no frightening people to faith, fear of hell...
- Let's be true to the Gospel.
- That involves our personal life-styles too - our care for others, our lying or integrity, our honesty with money, our self-control, our lack of laziness...
- Our character will match that seen in Jesus, the one the Spirit desires to form in us:
  - Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.
- Involve getting to know - and bringing our lives under the direction of God's Word.

**It took them outside their comfort zones**

- *(image: Outside our comfort zones)*
- Final brief point:
  - God's task, done God's way, took Joshua and the people outside their comfort zone - into dangerous territory.
- Most clearly seen in the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh:
- They had to leave their newly conquered homes behind, their wives, family and possessions, and lead the way.
- They had to demonstrate a generosity with their time and service to be a bridgehead, the shock troops for the others.
- They had all the advantages - home-base, security - but they had to use that secure base for others and not for sitting back upon.
- Often that will be true for us too.
- Those of us who are "secure" will often have to spearhead new ventures and initiatives, to break the ground for others.
  - That may be financially, resourcing opportunities that would otherwise be missed, at personal loss;
  - That may be with our time, giving rather than keeping to ourselves;
  - That may be spiritually, perhaps drawing on the teaching we have received over many years to be the lynch-pin in a new situation where we can't be as well fed as we are used to.
  
- Not forced - not brow-beaten into it.
- Rather willing, glad service as part of their worship of God.

**Conclusion**

- *(image: Be strong and very courageous)*
  - Passage comes back to **"Be strong and courageous"** - and so should we.
  - Not overwhelmed, but strengthened by the knowledge of God's presence with us and His promise to help.
- Be strong and very courageous:**
- As we set out again together on the adventure of working and witnessing together in this parish of the love of Jesus Christ.
  - Firm in the knowledge that it is HIS strength, HIS ability, HIS enabling, HIS Spirit at work that enables anything of value to be accomplished.