

# Joshua 5:13-6:5, 20

Pentecost 2, Supplement Series C, May 29, 2016

Theme: Join Joshua in faith

I. Humble before the LORD                      II. Listening to his Word

INJ One of the quirks of my personality is that I make picky little language distinctions. I notice spelling errors and it bugs me when punctuation and English grammar are not correct. Sometimes, I can let those things pass. Usually, it isn't a big deal. When it comes to God and his word, though, communicating correctly is a bit more important.

One distinction shows itself in our lesson. When we face difficulty, we often take comfort, saying that God is on our side. But think about that statement, and get picky about it. If God is on my side, does that make me in charge? It is "my" side! I am in charge and he had better listen? Not ever! When we talk about Christian faith sometimes small distinctions in words and expressions make a big difference. Our lesson with Joshua and Jericho helps us be careful and clear. Join Joshua in a faith that is humble before the LORD and that listens to his word.

The Bible History of the fall of Jericho is familiar to many, but our reading begins at a less well-known time when preparations for the battle were being made. Put yourself into Joshua's sandals. He is the new leader of God's people, after Moses had died. The job God has given him is immense! Just invade the land and take it over, starting with this fortress called Jericho. And lead the people, millions of them, who God often describes as stiff necked and stubborn.

Talk about an intimidating situation! The LORD, the God of grace, had appeared to Joshua to calm him down and to comfort him. The phrase God used eight times was this: "Be strong and courageous." "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified, do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

So Joshua took a walk to clear his head and to finalize his battle plans. How could he be strong? Moses had done this job for 40 years! He was a prophet like no other, and Joshua was just a normal person. Be strong! Don't show your fear. Exude confidence and act like you know what is going on. The people will have no choice but to follow where you lead.

But — Jericho was a massive obstacle. The walls were feet thick, and it was impenetrable. They were ready and waiting, so there was no element of surprise. What kind of a plan would be effective? And the Israelite army was not a corps of elite soldiers. This could really turn out badly. Be courageous, Joshua! Don't let weakness be seen. Bark out orders. Make

decisions. You are in charge. Be strong and courageous!

Then Joshua saw a person standing there. He had a sword drawn. Was he a friend or a foe? The question is natural, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" Joshua was in charge. Are you on my side? Put your sword at my feet and promise to follow me. I am strong and courageous!

The person standing there answered the question in an unexpected way: "I am neither for you nor for your enemies. I am the Commander of the armies of the LORD, and I have come to do my job." In other words, "I am the LORD, and I am in charge here, not you, Joshua."

What a perspective change for Joshua! Proud Joshua who thought he was so important realized that he doesn't control things. Joshua who wanted to be strong understood that he is weak. Worse than weak, he is sinful. Standing before the Holy God, his sins are so much more obvious. The coarse language he used with the soldiers. The lies he spoke trying to protect himself. The violence he perpetrated. The indecency he committed. Those were nothing compared to the pride of his heart that put his desires in the place of God's. That downplayed God's Word in favor of his own ideas. The arrogance that figured he was strong all by himself.

Take your sandals off in the presence of Holy God! Turn from your sin, and humble yourself before the LORD. Like Joshua, our sins are obvious, and we have no strength to stand. Join him in humble repentance.

Joshua was supposed to be courageous. How foolish he had been to make plans that depended on human wisdom and cunning. Here is God himself to use his almighty power to work all things for the good of those who love him. Joshua could not be courageous by trusting himself. Courage only stands when it puts confidence in the God of grace, the LORD.

Victory only comes from him. The enemies — sin and death and Satan — are too strong for us to defeat. The LORD must come and do for us what is impossible on our own. And what a battle plan it is! He commanded his army to stand down while all the fury focused on his Son. Jesus bore every ounce of judgment for our sins. The agony of the cross. The humiliation from the enemy. Forsaken by the Father. It looked like defeat. The plan seemed foolish. But Jesus won. Death could not hold him. He is risen! Now sins are all forgiven. You have the victory in Christ Jesus.

Here is a consistent truth about the Christian faith. Our faith is not about us — how we feel or what we do. Our faith is valuable because of its object: Jesus Christ. He is the LORD who has saved me. He is the mighty one who has defeated the enemy. He is the forgiver of my sins. He is my Savior. I am weak and needy. I have merely received his gracious blessing. My faith is in him who gives me the victory. He is not so much on my side

as I have now been put on his.

So, like Joshua, we fall before the LORD in humble worship. This is holy ground, where God reveals himself as Savior. Where we are brought low in repentance and raised to new life by the proclamation of peace. We aren't here to proclaim "My faith, my faith, my faith!" We say, "My Lord, my Savior, my God!" Join Joshua in humble faith before the LORD.

Here we are, and the Commander of the LORD's army has come. What magnificent battle scheme will he devise? If it were me, I would move the flank over there and bring up the reinforcements to this point. There might be a weakness that we can capitalize on. Can you see Joshua giving God suggestions – orders? – as to what he should do? No! Joshua said, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?" God reveals his battle plan, and we join Joshua in faith, listening to God's Word.

This is the more familiar part of the Bible History. Let's analyze the way God planned out the battle scheme. The city is before them, tightly shut up. It says not one person went out or went in. They were in siege mode, and all the defenses were raised. Archaeologists tell us that Jericho was built to withstand any attack. How would the LORD win the victory?

I summarize his plans this way: "Tell the soldiers to do nothing, and I will take care of it." Don't make siege towers. Don't try to infiltrate the perimeter. Don't devise a way to overpower. Do nothing. Trust me.

OK. So while the warriors were not warrior-ing, what should they do? God gave them one task. Take the ark of the covenant and march it around the city. Have the army march in procession, too. Go all the way around the walls one time. Then come back to camp, done for the day. Do this for six days in a row. March. Sit.

Why? We aren't told why. But I can think of one reason. What message was communicated by the marching? All the people in Jericho would see the Israelites expressing their confidence in the LORD their God. The ark of the covenant was there, the place where God had put the evidence of his presence. These people trusted in the true God, the Triune God, the LORD who saves. These Israelites were different from other threats Jericho had faced. They came in the name of the LORD.

Isn't that an important message? I know, the marching around must have seemed silly to the Israelites. It served no military purpose. But it did express their faith. They listened to God's Word. Their light of faith shone brightly for all to see. Even though it didn't make sense and it wasn't what they expected, they listened. They became known as the people who listened to the word of the LORD. March. Sit. Listen to what God says.

And then make noise. Not just any noise, but a shout that praises

the God who gives the victory. A noise that thanks him for doing the fighting and the winning. A noise that honors him for his mercy and undeserved love. Shout with all your voice. Blow the ram's horn trumpets. Get everyone's attention because the LORD will do something spectacular. He will do the impossible!

What will he do? "Then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in." What will the LORD do to win the victory? Everything. Watch him give the enemy into your hands. You won't have to do anything! It sounds unbelievable. Our heads want to make up some way we can participate. But we cannot. Join Joshua in faith that listens to God's Word. The LORD does everything, and you win.

The Christian faith is peculiar. Nowhere does it rely on our smarts, our ability, our effort. We have forgiveness and heaven because God did everything in Christ Jesus. Just like he did with the walls of Jericho, God completely wiped out every obstacle to our receiving his gracious gifts. We are washed clean of sin in baptism. In Holy Communion we are given confidence that our debt has been paid by the blood of Christ. The word of God speaks clearly and boldly of peace with God. Listen to the words! Don't just hear them, but listen. Take them to heart. Use them.

And then that noise you make will be a joyful sound. I think it interesting God did not command four part harmony. He did not designate the tune to be played on the trumpets. He just wanted noise. Some of you are hesitant to sing in church because you are fearful that the sound won't be pleasant. God doesn't care! Make a noise. God has given you the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot remain silent! Shout for joy to the Lord your God. He is your salvation. Join Joshua in faith that listens.

This account of Jericho isn't really about the walls of the city, is it? The point is not marching or making noise. Nor is it Joshua. The LORD won the victory for his people. Join Joshua, rejoicing in the object of your faith, Jesus. He gets all the attention. He did all the work. We now rejoice in the fruits, the spoils of victory, the gift of God's blessing.

Speaking carefully, I suppose I should not claim that the LORD is on my side. Rather, I am on his. Or, he has put me in the winner's circle. Sometimes, the words we say don't communicate as clearly as we would like. So don't be offended if I am picky once in a while. But don't be afraid to speak up, either. Your faith cannot be silent! Join Joshua in faith, for the victory is yours through Christ Jesus your Lord. With a humble attitude come before the LORD in repentance for sin. Listen to God's Word, for it proclaims your forgiveness. The Word of our God not only informs our faith, it strengthens and keeps it. And makes it loud! SDG Amen.