

Sermon Text for January 1, 2023

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Joshua 1:1-9

Covenant renewal for 2023

Before sitting down and writing this sermon today I sat down and read through all 11 of my previous covenant renewal sermons. You see today you don't really get a sermon because at the beginning of the year, the first Sunday of the year, we renew our covenant before God as a congregation and also as individuals. So this time looking at the Scripture that we just read is brief, but still important. I haven't preached on Joshua 1 before for our covenant renewal service. Let me tell you why I choose this Scripture, I changed it in the middle of the week actually.

I feel as if 2023 is going to be a year of tremendous transition for this congregation. Our Joshua Scripture is one where Moses, you all have heard of him before, right? Well, he is being replaced. There can be no greater transition in the life of a nation than when Joshua took over for Moses. But as that transition was taking place God spoke to Joshua and said these words that we read in chapter 1. He gives him a promise that all that he told Moses would happen, is going to happen with Joshua. Nothing that was promised to the people of God will come up short.

Will take this promise as ours for 2023? We are going to have a massive change in leadership in this church with elders and deacons and trustees turning over like we have never had before. As you come on to serve hear these words and promise me that you will believe that the promises of Scripture are true and what God has promised will come about. If we can face our future together with this certainty then we will be much better equipped for whatever comes our way.

Joshua is told to be strong and courageous. Strength and courage are two items that are fundamentally necessary to be a child of God. You need to be strong to be a disciple. You don't need to be strong to believe, but you do need to be strong in order to follow Jesus and his wishes in your life. You don't need to be strong to be a Christian, anyone can do that, but to actually live out the commandments of Matthew 25, well that takes both strength and courage. That is my request of you. Don't just believe, but follow Jesus and if you do that, you will need to rely on the strength and the courage that only Christ can provide.

Finally, look at vs.8, God encourages Joshua to use the book of the law, that would be the Bible, as a guide to life. We can be a part of the life of this church and never open the Bible.

You could be an elder in this church and not once open the Bible during the week. You could do it, but your decisions will be your own and not those guided by God. This is true not just of leaders in this church, but also to all of us, even the every day worshippers. You can send your kids to Clubhouse, and youth group, and you yourself could be involved in programs without once opening a Bible. You could do that, but you would not be a follower of Jesus, you would just believe and it would have no impact on your life.

This year, let's do things differently. Let's actually live what we say we believe. Let's be strong and courageous even if it means bucking the status quo for what culture and society tells us is best for the community but Scripture says something very different. Let's trust the promises of Scripture that God will be by our side in all seasons of our life. Finally, let's open the Bible this year and read it. Let's try to understand how God is actually trying to guide our lives.

Let's talk a little about this insert that you have in front of you. In 1775 John Wesley used this format for one of his services and credit goes to him for the content of this service. I was introduced to it when I began my ministry in 1995 in Portici, Italy, in a Methodist Church there. Wesley, who began the Methodist movement, found this service rich and meaningful as he expressed in his journal "Many mourned before God, and many were comforted.", and "It was, as usual, a time of remarkable blessing". As you can see this can be a powerful service if you let it be.

If you would take out the booklet which is in your bulletin. Notice that the heart of this service is found in the Covenant Prayer. This prayer requires persons to commit themselves to God. This covenant is serious and we must take it seriously. At the beginning of the prayer I will pause for a few moments to allow people to kneel if they so desire, or to bow your head in respect to the Almighty God and to the step which we are about to take together in this prayer. We will be held responsible for that in which we take part, good or bad. Approach this service with reverence, seriousness, and an open heart to God.

You will notice that each bulleting contains a copy of the covenant service. On the last page of the service you will find a space where you can put your signature and the date. I want to encourage all of you to read through, pray through this service. If you feel that you are able to recommit or commit yourselves for the first time to the promises which are written in these pages then sign it, mark the date, and please call me or let me know that you have done that so that I can pray for you and so that we can talk about what is involved in this recommitment, or this

commitment.

It is now the year 2023, we will be taking together the first Lord's Supper together of the New Year. But even more importantly today in this service you will be given an opportunity to embrace the new life that Jesus has chosen for you. How fitting it is that we will be able to recommit our lives to Christ and then together take part in the sign of that new commitment in the Covenant of the Lord's Supper. We will also have represented an opportunity for you to remember your baptismal covenant by taking a blue bead from the fountain and take it home as a reminder of the covenant that you made today.

Let us now renew our promises before Almighty God.