

Do not be afraid, because I am with you!

SERMON January 3, 2021

Scripture reading: Joshua 1:1-9

Golden verse: *“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.”* Joshua 1:7

Dear Beloved, at the beginning of this new year we can discover two things in us: curiosity and a little fear. Curiosity about what the new year will bring, but also how our world will deal with this horrible virus which destroyed our previous year. Some of us would suggest not to count our lives in months. Let’s wait and see what happens next week, and at the end of the month, and how will we reach the end of the year?

We are inevitably afraid of the unknown. What will this year bring for me? Am I going to stay healthy or am I going to deal with sickness? How am I going to accomplish my tasks in the family, at work? Am I going to be strong enough to put up with all the challenges?

Parents are also a little scared. How is the rest of the school year going to go? It would be nice if a huge hand would be always there for us, and if you needed help, it would help. Or someone invisibly would always be present and whisper in our ears the words and encouragement we need. It would be nice if He would give good thoughts, and would take care of us.

I once saw a father waking with his grade one son towards the school. The little one started to stumble, right on the edge of a large puddle. He would have fallen if his father had not held his hand tightly. When the little child stumbled, the father grabbed the small hand even harder and kept him from falling in the puddle.

Everyone longs for such a strong hand that would always be on standby.

I was about seven years old, when I wanted to help my mother in buying two bus tickets. I thought I can run faster and I will buy it so my mother would not have to wait in the line. As I started to run, I did not look to the left or right and I was ready to jump in front of a bus which was approaching with great speed. Suddenly, somebody grabbed my suit so strongly that a few buttons of my coat fell off. It was my mother. She grabbed me in the very last moment. And it was God’s providence who had a better plan with my life.

We all are dreaming these days about a similar strong hand. It would be nice if someone would take care of us, if such a protective hand would surround us. Our fathers or our mothers cannot keep us so safe anymore. On whom can we count then?

In today’s scripture reading, we heard about a very brave man, Joshua. However, once, he got very scared, when God appointed him to lead the people of Israel. Moses’ time expired, and now it was his responsibility to step into Moses’ big shoes.

God prepared this man for his tasks, and this is how our Lord wants to prepare all of us this morning for this new year. In Deuteronomy 34:9, just a few verses before the Book of Joshua starts, we read that *“Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him”* and he did everything according to God’s guidance. Through the Holy Spirit, Joshua was able to stay in a living and loving relationship with God. His mind and his heart were always properly resonating to God’s guidance. He was able to talk to God and to understand the Almighty. There is a hymn which said: *“I can lead only if Your Holy Spirit is leading me.”*

God was there with Joshua, and He declared something extremely important: *“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”* (Joshua 1:9) Don’t be afraid because I will always be with you. Do not be afraid, because I’m going in front of you. An invisible but real and strong hand will be always above you to protect you.

God assured Joshua about His constant presence. Now it was up to Josiah and the leaders if they believed what God promised, or not.

Joshua was very close to Moses, and when Joshua needed advice, he always went to Moses. Now Moses was gone, and he started to panic, because he didn’t know where he should go from now on for advice.

A few weeks ago, I asked somebody to whom she goes for advice. She said that she can discuss everything with her mother. Then I asked, where she would go for advice after her mother is gone. She said that she would discuss things with her father. And where would you go, I continued, if your father will be gone? long silence.

The Lord saw Joshua’s struggling. He said to him, and God says to you and me at the beginning of this year: Do not be afraid. When you will need advice, I will be here for you. I gave the law to Moses. Keep those in front of you. *“Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful”* Joshua 1:7-8.

And if something goes wrong, keep that in mind, Joshua. God said, I will not leave you, nor forsake you!

God gave them enough challenges, which were way over their wisdom and strength, just to develop their faith in God. Every day, they came to a conclusion that, without God, they would not be able to do anything. Without God’s help, they would not conquer, or survive.

I hope you all had these experiences, and not only once in your life, that God kept His promises: He was there with you, He did not forsake you, He protected you and He was holding your hand in His.

At the beginning of this year, our God is promising us that He will be with us during the whole year, no matter what we have to go through. He knows what he prepared for us and He knows what kind of protection we need. He knows everything about our worries. His huge hand, which created heaven and earth, will be there with you. His love will surround you. He will be a shield for you. He will be the rock under your feet. And if this pandemic will continue this year, He will teach us lessons that we have to learn. *“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go”* Joshua 1:9.

God wants to engrave these verses into your heart at the beginning of this year: “I will be with you wherever you go”.

“I will not abandon you.” God has taken His promise so seriously that, 2,000 years ago, He came to us incarnated in Jesus Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ promised us that that He is constantly with us: *“I am with you all the day, to the very end of ages”* Matthew 28:20.

Jesus Christ is the mighty hand of God. The hand of God was visible in Him. Because He is with us, we should not feel helpless, desperate or live in fear. Jesus Christ wants to take all these things from our hearts this morning with His promise: *“I am with you all the day.”* With Jesus Christ, there is no cause for fear. Christ will not to leave you alone.

If you believe in Jesus Christ, this faith will give you courage to go towards the future. Your faith will multiply your strength. You will walk together with others, but you will be different because you won't build up fear, knowing that you are walking with Christ.

And what God is expecting from us is clearly described: *“Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”* Joshua 1:7-8

The Bible looks like any other Book from the outside, but from the inside it is totally different. Through the Bible, God talks to us. He is expecting us to read this regularly, to meditate on His messages, because this is how He will guide us, step by step. The words will touch our brains first, then slowly will go into our hearts. As a next step, the words of God will be transformed in us into ENERGY. They will energize us.

I would like to propose to all of us to build into our lives the daily “Ten Minutes”. Every day, at a designated time and place, we should take ten minutes to read the Bible. We should read it continuously, starting with the Gospel of John, then Luke. Again, we should keep reading continuously, and not flipping back and forth. I finished here today; tomorrow I will continue from here. Then, we should meditate on what we read. Probably, at the beginning, we won't understand everything, but we will understand something. But what we do understand will make differences in our lives. Then we should talk to God about our problems, and we should ask Him for His help. I can tell you that these “Ten Minutes” will takes fear out of your heart, and will bring you closer to God.

Some of us have to take time every day to take our medications, to help our bodies to function better. Please care for your spirits as well by taking these “Ten Minutes” moments, and help your spirit and your faith to get stronger and healthier.

And if God was able to engrave into your heart His promise: “I will be with you wherever you go”, now it would be nice to take a commitment: Lord, I will not forsake You. This way we can start our journey with peace and comfort.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for being as powerful today as you were in the time of Joshua. Thank you for speaking to us as today through the Bible, through the sermon, and through Your Holy Spirit. Thank You, Father, for all Your promises You gave us at the beginning of this new year. Help us to apply all these in our lives.

Please take out all the fears from our hearts, but also take out all kinds of sin, pride and, arrogance. Fill us with your love. Give us sensitive and merciful hearts.

Dear Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for bringing us closer to our Heavenly Father, and thank you for promising us today that you will be with us every day. We want to practice this relationship with you. Teach us to pray simply and honestly during the day and in our silence. Help us to understand more and more of your word, and to think more and more accordingly.

We pray for those who are in difficult situations. We pray for those who are deprived, sick, who are alone, and who never heard of you. Be especially close to those who do not know this great promise that You would like to walk with them. Through Your Holy Spirit, help us to be able to tell others about Your love and providence, and help us to show You through our peaceful, and happy lives.

We pray for: ourselves, our loved ones, companions, parents, children, siblings, teachers, friends and neighbours. May Your blessing be upon us all and please make us a blessing to others. Amen.