

The Battles Begins

Joshua 1:1-9

Nov. 15, 2015

“Have you ever watched a documentary on how salmon swim upstream to spawn? These fish swim with all their might, against a strong current. They literally launch themselves up waterfalls and over jagged rocks. It is inspiring to watch.

Following God’s will in this world can be a lot like being a salmon swimming upstream. God calls us to fight against the cultural current every day of our lives. It is a battle, a war, and daily challenge to keep living for God in a world where the flow is diametrically opposed to God’s will and ways.” (The Story adult curriculum pg. 49)

What challenges or what battles are you facing now?

For Israelites, it was fighting against people in the land.

The chapter 7 of the Story is full of fighting stories. What bloody and violent wars they engaged to settle in the Promised Land. Killings mercilessly people in the land and even wives and children and animals that belong to them.

Who likes these violent stories in the Bible? They are too much. Why does God permit this incredibly violent fighting and killing?

Is God that violent? Does God love killing people? Isn’t it why some extremely religious people rationalize their military and violent acts, shouting, “It is God’s will. God is on our side. Let’s go and destroy those who are not like us.”? We keep wrestling with these question as we follow the Story.

We all are saddened and shocked by what happened in Paris, France last Friday evening. It was France’s 9 11. We keep people in France in our prayers.

I think it is God who is most saddened over what happened and what is going on in this world. What is going on in my world? I have created all things, including man and women and said, “it is good. It is very good.” Where is love? Where is peace? What is reconciliation? What are these people doing in my world?

What is the greatest challenge we people of God are facing in this world today? What keeps us from entering and settling in the Promised Land, full of milk and honey?

It is “my” and “me” mentality. It is “our” and “ours” attitude. My family, my religion, my culture, my nation. Mine is good and beautiful. Ours is worth keeping it. All others are

bad and ugly and should be destroyed. Fighting against this me-centered mentality is a spiritual battle we need to win daily.

In the Story, God tells Joshua and the people three things they need to be in order to settle in the Promised Land.

These three things are what we need to move from me-centered life to God-centered life.

1.

God tells Joshua and the people to be people of the book—the word of God. “This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful.” Joshua 1:8

When Achan sinned by not heeding the word of God, the people lost the battle at Ai. After that loss, Joshua read the entire book of the law to the people. (Joshua 8:34) Be people of the Word of God.

Jesus says, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4) We have to eat bread daily to live physically well. But that is not only thing we do for living well. We gotta eat the word of God, as well.

Hebrews 4:12 “Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

In short, the word of God, living and active, transforms us and changes us and liberates us to see God more clearly and see ourselves in perspective. Get ready to be changed whenever you eat the Word of God.

How often do you have meal each day? Three times a day? Two times a day? Likewise, we need to eat the word of God daily.

Some prefer doing so in the morning and some in the evening. It is your preference. But eating the word of God daily is not a preference to choose. It is a must for us to be liberated from the bondage of self-pride and self-centeredness.

I am glad, very glad that we have been reading together the Greatest Story ever told, God's story. The confirmation class will join the congregation to follow the Story, beginning in December.

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Secondly, God tells Joshua and the people to be people of prayer. God says, "Talk to Me before you go to battle. I will be in front." The ark of the covenant, the powerful symbol of God's presence led the people in front. When they followed God, they were able to cross over the Jordan River and enter the city of Jericho.

Praying is letting God lead us in front. Praying is listening to God first and following God's leadership. Praying is giving up me-controlling life and accepting God-leading life.

You know my Tesesa. She was a woman of prayer. One day a report asked her about her silent prayer life. "What does God say when you listen in silence?" After a short pause, she answered, "God listens, too."

We have Taize prayer service. It is our spiritual discipline to take time and listen. And it is our desire to be renewed and transformed anew by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Lastly God tells Joshua and his people to be people who identify with God. At Gilgal all the males of Israel were circumcised as a sign of their identity with God. God says in effect, "Before you go into battle, I want all the soldiers to identify with me." Identifying with God is another way of overcoming our me-centered mentality.

Through baptism, we confess that it is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me. (Gal 2:22) It is a personal statement, for sure. But at the same time, it is a public proclamation to the world that I am committed to live for the purpose of God, giving up my selfish desire and purpose.

From today's Gospel lesson, we hear Jesus saying, "Where the treasure is, your heart is there also." "Where is your heart? Where is your treasure?"

One's spending habit shows his or her interest. A lot of money for traveling? He or she loves traveling. Spending a lot of money for dining out? He or she loves eating. For what do you spend a lot of money? How do you spend your money?

Tithing is a favorite topic whenever we talk about money. Tithing, taking one tenth of income, is a way to acknowledge God and the source of all the blessings we have. It helps us to be free from the tendency to worship money, rather than God.

A pastor in CA suggests another way to be free from worshipping the god of money: 10-10-80. 10 percent of your monthly income set aside for the ministry of the church, another 10 percent for tomorrows and the remaining, 80 percent for monthly living expense.

John Wesley, father of the Methodist movements encourages Methodists to “gain all you can, save all you can, then, give all you can.”

Why do Jesus and many teachers talk about money and how to do with it? Because they know money should not be god to worship and follow. Because we are called to serve God as people of God.

I am sure you heard about this. If we could reduce the world's population to a village of precisely 100 people, the demographics would look something like this:

The village would have 61 Asians, 13 Africans, 12 Europeans, 9 Latin Americans, and 5 from the USA and Canada. 50 would be male, 50 would be female. 75 would be non-white; 25 white. 67 would be non-Christian; 33 would be Christian.

80 would live in substandard housing. 50 would be malnourished and 1 dying of starvation. 33 would be without access to a safe water supply. 39 would lack access to improved sanitation. 24 would not have any electricity. 8 people would have access to the Internet. 1 would have a college education.

5 would control 32% of the entire world's wealth; all 5 would be US citizens. 48 would live on less than US\$ 2 a day. 20 would live on less than US\$ 1 a day.

Wow. I don't know how you take this. It is eye opening and awakening to me.

We are not alone for sure. A question, “How can we live in harmony?”

God wants us to being identified with God in this world, so that we, as people of God, do what God would do, give like God gives and love like God loves.

What is the most challenging upstream you are swimming against??

Eat the word of God, pray ceaselessly and identify with God not only words but also acts, and you will be able to arrive there, the land full of honey and milk, where you may taste and enjoy God's love, peace and justice. Amen. Amen. Amen.