

[God said to Joshua:] *"I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."* [Joshua 1:9]

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ and people of God of the Northeastern Ohio Synod,

Joshua 1:9 has long been one of my anchor verses. It often comes to mind at this time of the year. That's because May 17, 2018 is the fourth anniversary of my election to the office of bishop. So it was somewhat providential that Joshua 1:1-9 appeared as one of my devotional readings one morning this month, as if to remind me of the day the Holy Spirit called me to serve in this office.

I remember the day as if it were yesterday. I sat stunned, wondering what had just happened. My wife looked at me and saw the ashen look on my face. My legs were so wobbly I could not stand. Somehow, I managed to get up and walk to the podium to give my acceptance speech.

Even though in my mind I *knew* I would not be elected, a voice whispered to me the Friday night before the fifth and final ballot, that I should prepare an acceptance speech – just in case. The previous times in the process that called for speeches and answers to questions, I had not prepared anything. But that voice in my head said I should do this now. Was it God speaking to me? I don't know.

What I've learned in these four years is that exploring the unknown can be an adventure. To lead a synod, no matter the size, presents a multitude of challenges, just as

to be asked to lead a nation of many thousands was a great challenge for Joshua.

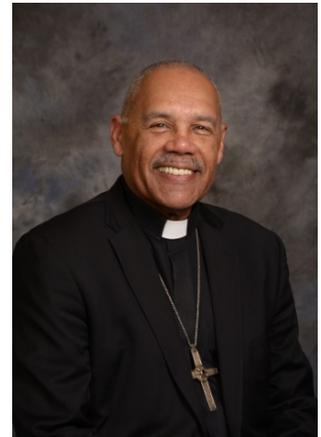
God set a great adventure before Joshua when God chose him to lead the people of Israel from the wilderness into the land of Canaan.

Moses had just spent forty years leading the Israelites through the wilderness. He was a great leader and man of God, but his time was up. He was to pass the reins to a new leader who was to lead God's people to the Promised Land. That man was Joshua.

At first Joshua wondered whether he could handle the job. So God encouraged this servant who would succeed Moses.

The first 9 verses of Joshua Chapter 1 can be characterized as God giving him a pep talk in preparation for his task.

As you read these verses, note that there is one phrase God mentions over and over, "be strong and courageous." God doesn't tell Joshua to take it slow and to pray over every little detail. God doesn't tell him to seek the advice and counsel of others before making every decision (although it



would be appropriate in some cases). God tells him to be "strong and courageous." God already had a purpose for Joshua, and God wanted him to accomplish it.

In a related story in the book of Numbers, we read of 12 men who were sent on a spy mission into the Promised Land. Upon returning from their mission, Joshua, along with Caleb, were the only two who said God could help the Israelites take the promised land. The other 10 were afraid (Numbers 13:30).

What this points out is that there is no such thing as courage apart from mission. Likewise, there is no such thing as faith apart from challenge. One is not just courageous to be courageous, but one is courageous for something.

As Christians, we can often spend much time trying to discern God's will for our lives. This plays itself out in us stopping at every intersection in life to cast our lots or waiting for a voice from God. How many times has God given us this pep talk and told us to be "strong and courageous," and we become timid and cowardly upon advice from those around us.

Courage doesn't mean that I am not afraid. It means that I fear God more than I fear my environment. It means that I trust in divine resources more than the resources of man.

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." The task was tremendous, yet God assured Joshua, as God assures us: "The

LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

At any point in our lives, both as individuals and congregations God can call us to do great things as it was with Joshua.

Putting our trust in God, we can go on our way unafraid. God promises strength when strength is needed. God gives courage when courage is needed. God confirms our faith in Jesus, our Savior. His power and His presence in His Word and sacraments support us as we face the challenges and opportunities ahead of us. We don't know what God may require of us in our future. But whatever God requires, we will be able to perform because God will be with us always.

Be strong and courageous, for God is with you.

Pentecost Blessings,



The Rev. Abraham D. Allende,  
Bishop