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Joshua 1:1-9, ESV.

1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, 2 "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. 3 Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. 4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. 5 No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. 6 Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Psalms 92:12–15, ESV.

*12 The righteous flourish like the palm tree
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
13 They are planted in the house of the LORD;
they flourish in the courts of our God.
14 They still bear fruit in old age;
they are ever full of sap and green,
15 to declare that the LORD is upright;
he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.*

Like a cedar.

Today, many active Christians are older people. The average age of an American who identifies as being Christian is around 55 or 60. The average age of someone who attends a church regularly is older than this. In many ways, the task of holding the faith, of keeping it alive for future generations is up to older people. I met a man at the YMCA of the Rockies when Wendy and I went there for a couple of days several months ago. He was perhaps ninety years old, I'm not sure. He was using a wheelchair. Wendy was off doing something else, perhaps in the pottery shop. I was in front of the main building. There were large planters around us, filled with blooming, colorful flowers, and in front of us was a stunning view of the mountains. But he wasn't paying any attention to that. He was reading his Bible. I squatted down next to him and said hi. He placed a bookmark in his Bible – it had at least twenty bookmarks in it – and he turned to me. Let's call him Eddie. Eddie and I talked for about fifteen minutes. I complimented him on his well-worn Bible, a New King James version. He said that he went through a Bible every few years and when it became too filled with notes of his, he would pass it on to one of his great grandchildren. When they were in elementary school, they would have a great time reading his comments and figuring out what they meant. They studied the Bible without even knowing it at first. He said that there had been a time when he

taught Sunday School at his church, that he taught high school kids. He told me that he had been in a wheelchair since the Korean war, that it hadn't stopped him from raising his kids, earning a living as an engineer, and teaching kids the Bible for over a half century. He said that he would sit in a corner in the Sunday School room, and the kids would come to him for assignments, that they would take turns sitting next to him in a chair. Mr. Eddie would give them each a passage. Their job was to read and research it. Then the entire group would come back to him, and they would discuss the various passages he had assigned. But, he said, a couple of years ago, he had had to finally stop. The problem wasn't him. There were no more high school students in the Sunday School program at his church. I asked him what he was reading in his Bible when I walked up to him. He rolled his wheelchair over to one of the planters so that I could sit on the edge of it. Then he said that he was trying to find inspiration from Joshua. His passage is our first reading today.

Joshua took over after Moses died at the entrance to the Promised Land. The Chosen People had wandered in the desert for forty years, with an entirely new generation of followers of God's laws being born and coming of age in the desert. Moses had preached extensively to them, bringing them up to speed on the teachings of God. Then Moses died. God had promised his people progeny, his blessing, and their own land to live on. The People of God would no longer be

wanderers. It was Joshua who was commanded by God to invade Canaan, slaughter its pagan inhabitants, and claim the land. The Canaanites had to be killed, so that the People of God would not be tempted to adopt their beliefs. This may well be a faith story, not actual history; it illustrates the dependability of God when it comes to keeping his promises to us - as long as we keep our side of the bargain. There is scientific evidence that strongly suggests that the Canaanites were not slaughtered, and that perhaps the Chosen People lived alongside them. But what's important here is that perhaps the most significant event in the history of the Chosen People is about to unfold: they are finally going to have the home promised to them by God. Joshua and his people stand before the Jordan River. They will cross it and enter Canaan. Here is a condensed form of the beginning of the Book of Joshua, named after the primary character in the story told in the book:

1 After the death of Moses, the LORD said to Joshua: "Now go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them. **3** Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. **4** From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. **5** I will not leave you or forsake you. **6** Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Be careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. **8** This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

We see that God commands Joshua to carry out his promise, made to Joshua's ancestors, that they will have their own land, their home. God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous. He is to remember to follow the Book of the Law. It is believed that this is a reference to the Pentateuch or Torah, the first five books of what we now call the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament. Most importantly, the Book of the Law contains the covenant between God and Moses, including the Ten Commandments. As the People of God enter the Promised Land, which will be renamed Israel, they must never depart from the path upon which God has set them. They are to never waver. They must read Scripture aloud. They must think about it day and night, so that they never break their covenant with God. And they have nothing to be afraid of – because God will be with them wherever they go.

As a little bit of background, the Book of Joshua shows signs have having been written by multiple authors and then heavily edited. We have no idea who wrote it. The Book of Joshua tells us about God's unlimited love for us, his determination to treat people with grace and forgiveness. It focuses heavily on the power of God. The Book of Joshua tells us that if we are obedient to God's commands, we will find spiritual success, but if we are disobedient, we will find spiritual failure. God grants us amazing gifts. We honor God by being responsible in our moral and ethical behavior. It's believed that the events in the Book of

Joshua happened late in the 13th century B.C. The Book of Joshua most likely evolved over a long period of time, and probably did not appear in its current form until the 6th or 7th centuries B.C. There are those who believe it was not completed until the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. At any extent, it's clear that the Book of Joshua was written at least six hundred years after the events that it describes took place. You can see how the content of the book might not reflect literal history, especially when we consider that biblical authors were not focused the way modern people are on very cleanly separating factual history telling from spiritual story telling.

Eddie, the man who had taught the Bible to young people for over a half century told me that he loves the Book of Joshua because it tells the story of a people about to confront an extraordinarily dangerous event – a war where they would face mighty and numerous opponents – and are given the following marching orders: trust God, don't be afraid, act with courage, and never, never, never stop reading, meditating on, and following the Word of God. That was how he had always tried to live his life, he told me. Then Eddie looked at me and said that it was my turn to suggest a Bible passage to study. I chose our second reading, Psalm 92. Here are verses 12 to 15:

¹² *The righteous flourish like the palm tree
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.*

¹³ *They are planted in the house of the LORD;*

they flourish in the courts of our God.
¹⁴ *They still bear fruit in old age;*
they are ever full of sap and green,
¹⁵ *to declare that the LORD is upright;*
he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Psalm 92 is labelled in the Book of Psalms as a song to be sung on the Sabbath, and that it should be offered up as a thanksgiving to God. It is the only Psalm dedicated to the Sabbath. It urges us to renew our connection with God and to always praise God. It tells us that God will vanquish our enemies and provide a safe place for us to honor God. It tells us that we will always recover from loss, that we will never be left destitute. The Psalm also includes instructions to those who do evil. In our passage, we see words intended for those who want to live righteously, to live according to the will of God. Verses 12 to 15 tell us that if we do honor God in our lives, we will flourish spiritually, like a palm tree in the desert, or like a cedar tree, which can grow to great heights and have very deep roots. The righteous also live in the house of God, not in the house of men. And the righteous, unlike those who do not live by the laws of God, still bear spiritual fruit in their old age; they never lose their sap and are always green with life. To those who live according to God's will, God is always their rock, throughout their lives. I told Eddie that he will always bear fruit, that just because his time as a Sunday School teacher is over doesn't mean that he is no longer declaring to others that God should be their rock too.

I cannot tell you what became of Eddie. Not long after we talked about those two Bible passages, from Joshua and Psalms, his granddaughter collected him up and rolled his chair away. As he left, without looking back toward me, he lifted his hand and waved goodbye. We all can learn from him. Those of us who are of the older generation, we must stand like a palm tree in the desert. We must have deep roots and we must remain green, full of life, like an ancient cedar. We can't decide that it's time to retire, to shut down, to let younger people pick up the torch and pass on the Word of God. We are needed. Unlike older people in previous generations, it is critical that we continue to serve. Consider these words from our passage from Joshua: *4From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory.* Without going into a geography and history lesson, this is a much larger area than is believed was ever controlled by the Israelites. People have wondered if perhaps, by not gaining all this territory, Joshua's people failed and did not do as God commanded. Others have argued that archeological and literary evidence indicates that the Chosen people, the Twelve Tribes of Israel, once commanded much of this greater area. Others have suggested that this language is poetic, not to be taken literally, and that it tells us that we are to spread the faith as far as we can, that there are no earthly bounds

to the land of the believers. We are not to create a global theocracy; rather, we are to look as far as we can in every direction, and even this is not the limit of where we can carry the Word of God.

Remember that Job was a man who was tested by Satan in the most gruesome ways. He lost his home, his children, his property, absolutely everything. But he never lost his trust in God. He refused to curse God. He stuck to his belief that God would always be with him. In the middle of his trials, Job declares this:

*⁹ Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the LORD has done this?*

*¹⁰ In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of all mankind.*

*¹² Wisdom is with the aged,
and understanding in length of days.*

Job never forgets that we are all in the hands of God, that every breath we take is a gift from God. He also knows that as we age, we become wiser, that our understanding of the world and of God's ways increase. What Job might not have known is that the day would come when the wisdom of the aged would be so critical to the survival of our faith. Please pray briefly with me.

God, give us the strength to be strong and courageous, to bear spiritual fruit in our old age. Let us maintain the fire of faith. Let us be the generation who refuses to forget your command to never turn away from you. Amen.