

Joshua 1: 1-9

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, "My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. 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. 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."

Sisters and brothers,

here we are. After a longer or shorter journey by U-Bahn or car we are all gathered here at Philippuskirche. We had to leave our former church home and we are taking with us our way of living our faith, being open, all-embracing, creative, exciting... We are overwhelmed by the welcome the children had here about a month ago and we hope to be able to please and surprise the Philippus people positively, and that our new beginning here can help us and them to mutually grow, blossom and thrive...

The beautiful thing about our journey here and our move into this house is that we did not have to say goodbye to our Peace Church family. All are still with us. All were on the way with us, and all are excited with the new start. We are still able to see each other, meet with each other, continue to support each other and dream our dreams with each other.

And in all this I am reminded a lot of the people of Israel journeying to Promised Land.

I did not pick the story of the beginning of the Exodus, but chose the story before they could actually enter the new land where they had hoped milk and honey would flow.

Many of us look back on more than one journey in our lives. Many of us have moved freely or out of need and fear many times. All together we have behind us a journey of restlessness, questions and fears in the past weeks and months, but now all that will come to an end:

We have been offered ground under our feet and a roof over our heads. And we rejoice!

We decided to travel lightly, not carrying too much with us. Not things, but also not memories. Of course we have the memories of over 30 years in Friedenskirche, and most of them are joyful and happy. Some of them are tough, and we wish we could have sorted them better but we couldn't because we are all human, - nothing more and nothing less.

We are not entirely free from the burdens of the past. We carry with us bits that can make the transition difficult. But those should not be what count most.

What counts most is the precious knowledge that every step into the future is protected by a loving and guiding God.
And in order to understand that let's remember the story of Joshua.

For Israel a long era had come to an end. They'd lived in Egypt, a foreign country. They'd suffered from slavery and oppression, and they'd never felt really at home. They fled from Egypt and survived the long journey through the desert. Temptations had come – like the golden calf - a god you could see and hold. But there were also experiences that gave comfort and support. They received new orders for life at Mount Sinai. They discovered a reliable and trustworthy God, who'd accompany them and walk at their side. The desert lay behind them. The new land lay ahead.

Much of this is like our life journey.
We've managed to live through the past years, even though it didn't always feel comfortable. There were times in which we couldn't live as we would have liked to.
We had to carry on, through our own times in the desert, we had to free ourselves from bonds that threatened to hold us fast. We had to take risks, we had to show courage and self-confidence. Every now and again the past tried to catch up with us and haunt us. At times we idealised the past, wishing we could turn back the clock. Sometimes we'd walk in circles, build our own small holy shrines and be fascinated by them. Then we'd realize we'd followed the wrong path, worshiped the wrong God.
And in all these experiences we also met the reliable, trustworthy God who loves us,
who calls us by our names,
who walks with us.
Now we are all standing in this new place.
And an exciting church life awaits us.

A new era begins.
For the people of Israel it starts on the bank of the Jordan, only a river away from the promised land.
What lies ahead?
The promise in those days was clear: The country of your future will reach from the mountains to the sea. There you shall live!
And the promised land for us?
We have set our feet on it... and we can see a church year lie ahead of us: an all-age service next Sunday, our weekly programmes, the harvest festival in October, the sleepover of our kids in November, Advent and Christmas...
We are hoping all will go well, we are trusting that we can get familiar with some new ways in which things will have to take place, we have organised the bare bones already and are looking forward to sorting the details step by step. Getting to know the new place and our new host community will take time. And we have it. We have time and much more: we have trust and faith, friends at our side and

brothers and sisters who share the loads and burdens which threaten to weigh us down!

We wish to find a home, to settle down, to celebrate life in community and to live a life of peace and calm...

The promised land –we are standing at the river's edge, picturing what it will be like.

And we can hear the words Joshua heard:

When you go, no one shall be able to stand against you, no one will stop you.

As I was with Moses, so will I be with you, I will not fail you or forsake you.

Just be strong and courageous...

The people of Israel standing at the Jordan, will eventually cross over and enter the new land.

But: the new land is not an empty country.

The Canaanites live there already:

cities and city walls, farms and fields, people like you and me...

The land is already cultivated and inhabited.

There is a church here who has their own plans and programmes.

People who have been around longer than we have...

And we expect to get to know each other, to walk miles together and find out what our church lives can look like if lived in togetherness.

We may have to change old habits and embrace new ways of communicating, organising and carrying out things... And in God's name we will manage successfully.

We should not be fearful, but thoughtful.

We should not hold back but share freely.

We should not be shy but see the richness we already have which can be shared here in the new place.

And we have God's promise:...do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go...

Our new place is filled already with people, ideas, history, memories of joy and pain.

And with challenges..., but also with God's grace going ahead of all of us: Peace Church people and the Philippuskirche folk.

And, in all that, we won't be taking one step that God will not watch over.

"Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you".

I am already there with all my love and support.

I won't leave you on your own.

Now go on and cross the Jordan, you and all these people!

Let us follow this call, and let our guide be the love of God.

No one shall enter the new land with ideas of power, competition and selfishness.

Wherever we walk we walk in the footsteps of Christ.

And the only commandment we listen to is his love.

...do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left!

Don't turn away when you face a challenge.

Keep your eye fixed on your goal.

Joshua - New Beginning at Philippuskirche

Stick to your hopes; let nobody put you off.

Don't let go of your aims, act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God and change the world. Don't turn away...

Times of transition are always exciting and challenging.

We need courage, faith and trust.

I will be with you – God's promise to Joshua is there for us too.

It is the source of our courage and the beginning of all change –

to be tasted today in bread and in wine,

in the community at the Lord's table that wants to encourage and strengthen us for the land and the life that lie ahead.

May God bless this new beginning here at Philippuskirche and fill the two congregations here with mutual love, peace and understanding.

Amen.