

## Sermon on Isaiah 41:10 & Joshua 1:1-11

### Reading

Isaiah 41:10

Do not fear, for I am with you,  
do not be afraid, for I am your God;  
I will strengthen you, I will help you,  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

### Reading

Joshua 1:1-9

#### God's Commission to Joshua

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. (...)

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.»

“Do not fear”, sisters and brothers, “for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

When I sat together with Bertha and Matthias on Monday to talk about Henry's baptism I was fascinated by the happiness and sense of wonder those two go about the changes coming up in their lives.

They had kind of settled here, then Matthias applied for a job for fun... Just to try it out... The job would be in Bertha's home country Malawi... And guess: he got the job. A bit too early to their taste, but they went for it. Now Matthias has the job, and it is clear that eventually the young family will leave Munich and move to Malawi. Before that, just to make everything a bit more exciting, Matthias will have a training unit in York, in the North of England...

I sat there, listened and admired the two... the three...

I feel so honoured to have been asked to baptise Henry... and I asked myself what to give you three for your journey... and two Bible texts came to my mind.

We have just heard them.

Sometimes – when I try to picture the future I am really curious and excited and looking forward to all that may happen. But sometimes, I must admit, I have my doubts and fears...

Who knows what will happen?

Who knows in which world our children will live?

So much has already happened... so much great stuff, so much we couldn't have dreamed of but also things we would have never chosen.

We sat in confirmation class last Sunday and tried to get to know each other better. There were questions we asked about ourselves – like what are your hobbies, what's your favourite food and so on....

And one of the questions was: "what is the best ever happened to me in my life"... A hard question...

I came up with "the best ever happened to me is that I met Reiner, my husband", Nico talked about experiences in hospital 9 years ago, about awesome and encouraging people he met there, someone talked about a great and beautiful trip, another about exams which had gone really well...

We all experience good and bad things, bright and dark moments, and we all know that not everything in life goes well...

We need protection, guidance, support...

Our kids do.

Henry does...

How can we protect him? How can his parents and his family, his friends protect him?

And what when he grows up, when the time comes when we will not be able to protect our children but have to let them go?

What will happen then?

Will there be others to support them?

Will they be able to look after themselves?

Protect themselves?

Make wise decisions?

Will it be enough, what we have been able to give to them, what we passed on to them?

Will the seed that we've planted come to blossom and bear fruit? And what fruit?

"Do not fear, for I am with you," – these words can be a comfort, but they are no life insurance against the dangers of life.

God's assurance "Do not be afraid, for I am your God," does not spare us or our families and friends from the hard and dark side of life. But it does promise us that God will be at our side and see us through the dangers, toils and snares, as we sing so often in "Amazing Grace".

God will be with those we love and care about. God will keep them and hold them. God will walk with them on their life journeys, and he will uphold them and strengthen them. This is what Isaiah told the people then, and tells us now.

My thoughts today are all about giving to our kids what we can, what we know, what we believe...

It needs us, - to give people a chance to learn about God, to be able to experience him and build up a relationship with him.

It needs us – parents, friends, family, sisters and brothers here in church – people, great and small... to show others what our faith means to us, and who God is for us.

People need to be told what we believe.

Our faith will be mirrored in their lives... will build up their own way of believing.

There is an amazing closeness of Isaiah's words to the words God speaks to Joshua, when he makes him a leader of his people and shows him which way to go.

Reading through this story in which God calls Joshua into leadership and affirms the old promises given to his people, I realised in what a fascinating line of tradition "faith takes place". It is not only about me believing, or my children becoming believers.

It is all about that long line of people sharing their faith over decades and centuries. This is the line – or maybe better: the network – which we are all part of... here at Peace Church, worldwide, then and now and in the future...

In Joshua's story God reaffirms his commitment to his "old" promise. They had all heard it many times.

It was the promise given to Moses: "...every place where you set your foot, I have given to you..."

A promise first made to – just remember – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They'd all lived with it.

They all walked the paths of their lives with it.

They were all motivated and sustained by the promise of land...

God had promised to bless Abraham's and Sara's descendants and to bring them into the "promised land", a rich land, flowing with milk and honey and prosperity.

This was the vision that kept them all going – generation after generation – in those many years of wandering.

The promise of a home...

The promise of a place to stay – a place where they belonged!

And while they still were on their way, God would surely be with them: "As I was with Moses, I will be with you..."

Joshua had walked with Moses long enough to have an idea of what this meant.

God was so close to Moses, and now God makes the same promise to Joshua, and the people God wants him to lead fearlessly.

A lot of history lies behind Joshua and his people. And yet: after the death of Moses they are there... standing on the bank of the Jordan, somehow ready to cross over... hoping that milk and honey would flow richly on the other side.

Where does his story cross our own life journeys or the paths our children may choose to follow?

We know what it feels like standing at a crossroads with something new lying ahead.

New land in front of us...

Often we know so well what lies behind...have managed to live through the past, through the good times and through the rough patches...

but we have no idea what lies ahead.

We don't know what we will have to meet and put up with on the other side of the river.

We don't know what life holds in store for us...

The people of Israel had no clue what to expect on the other side of the Jordan. The only thing they knew after all these years of wandering was that God would be with them. A reliable, trustworthy God who loves his people, who calls them by their names and walks with them.

"The country of your future will reach from the mountains to the sea," the Israelites were told. "There you shall live."

"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..."

Is that what we can hear, too, when we look into the future?

Can you hear it, Bertha and Matthias?

It is exciting to move on...

And wherever we go we take with us ourselves and our history.

All these big and small personal things that we all carry with us...

And then we meet others, live in new contexts, face challenges and explore the unknown. We learn about the world we live in and ask ourselves, how much of our and our children's future is already determined by the place and time they live in? The society they live in, the school system they grow up with, the languages they speak, the friends they make, the God faith they grow up with?

How much of their future is at risk because of pollution, world politics, injustice, discrimination?

How much depends on a happy family life, friends at your side and your own personality?

And what influence has our status in society, how much we earn and what education we can provide? The colour of our skin, whether we are male or female?

What lies ahead us? Ahead of us, ahead of our kids, and ahead of Bertha, Matthias and Henry?

Life ahead is not an empty land, people and opportunities are waiting there...

However old we are, whatever we strive for, however we develop, I want to believe that it is the promised land that we all are heading for,

here in Munich,

in a new job,

a new school,

a new house,

or in Malawi

or elsewhere in this world...

Promised land...

which we sometimes enter easily

and sometimes with fears and struggles...

My wish for us all is that whatever comes in our individual lives, we can see the steps forward as an entering of promised land...

Like the Israelites we will have to be careful and wise, patient and strong...

We will have to be courageous and persistent, full of hope and dreams and the will for life.

Steven Hawkins who died last week, once said: "As long there is life, there is also hope no matter how bad you feel your life has become..."

Okay, I think... he must have known what he said.

If he managed with all his physical limitations, why would we not...

Especially since as a Christian I have more than just my life. I have my faith...

I have the promise "...do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord, my God, is with me wherever I go..."

And what is lying ahead is not only struggles and challenges but also God's grace: God's grace going ahead of us.

Neither we nor our children, nor our children's children will take 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, says God, with all my love and support. I won't leave you alone!

Now go on, cross the river... take the next step. Live your lives.

Move on...

... follow God's call, and let your guide always be the love of God. Walk in the footsteps of Christ, who welcomed and blessed the children and showed us how to love and... love and love and love again...

Do not be frightened – were words for Joshua and his people, and for countless courageous men and women throughout the history of humankind.

They are also meant for us – you and me, mothers and fathers, families and friends. For Bertha, Matthias and Henry...

I will be with you – is God's beautiful promise for us today; and it is the source of all courage and new beginnings.

Amen.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, you watch over us with endless love and care. We thank you for the journey of life and each of its stages. We thank you for childhood and adulthood; we thank you for family and friends and people who cross our paths. May the roads we travel lead us and those we love ever closer to you, and may we at all times hear you say: Do not fear, for I am with you... Amen.