

**Sermon Notes:** August 25, 2024      **Focus:** Books of Joshua (today's reading) and Judges (almost never read in the lectionary)      [Lectionary](#)

I find myself very curious about the relationship between the Joshua and Judges.

**Joshua in one line:** The Hebrews enter Cana after 40 years of wandering.

**Judges in one line:** It's messy after the occupation of Cana.

However imperfectly accomplished, I would like to compare the two books and apply them to our culture. I am not preaching a political sermon, per se; however, I think these two very different Biblical books are political – how to live with each other.

Joshua has big views of right and wrong. It also gives moral direction for entering the promised land while leaving out a lot. The chaos in the book of Judges was brewing even during Joshua's leadership. We have lost some tolerance for the complexities of life. This even more true beyond us fine St Timothians - a little friction in Danville is a like a siren call to the looniest people.

I know this first-hand from school board meetings and trying to share good things about St. Timothy's on "Nextdoor." As loony November approaches, you only need to spend 3 minutes online to see things getting brittle. Click bait is a type of headline meant for you to follow the link. "Trump goes berserk after interview" or "Harris is quaking that X will be revealed." The promise is: *you're right, click here, and confirm the righteousness of your worldview.* – We all lose this way.

Normal? Probably. Better way? Maybe. I want to end the notes today by shifting from the book comparison to a view of church that hopefully ties this all together. The Polis, the church, requires hard work, good work, holy work.

**Joshua:** The book of Joshua focuses the belief that God's promises were being fulfilled in the conquest of Cana. It emphasizes the idea that God is with the people as they conquer and settle the land. This can only be true if they behave correctly now and in the future. Who is Joshua in context?

**Mentor and Disciple of Moses:** Moses was the leader of Israel who guided the people out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and toward the Promised Land. Joshua was initially Moses' assistant. He was one of the twelve spies sent to scout out Cana. Joshua was very bullish on entering the land.

**Trust and Delegation:** One of the first instances where Moses delegates leadership responsibility to Joshua is during the battle against the Amalekites. Joshua leads the army while Moses prays on a hill. Secondly, Joshua accompanied Moses partway up Mount Sinai when Moses received the Ten Commandments.

**Leadership Succession:** God instructed Moses to appoint Joshua as his successor. This ensured continuity of leadership and stability for the Israelites as they entered a new phase—conquering and settling Cana. *I have a thesis: We really want the world to be as simple as Joshua: Love God, act right, and you will get what you want.*

*However, Judges paints a chaotic picture of what happens after they enter the land. We need both to understand ourselves.*

**Judges in the lectionary:** Sometimes research really shocks me, and this is one of those times. You will only hear one reading from the Book of Judges every three years, while you will hear Joshua four times. You will hear about Deborah the Judge, but not Ehud or Gideon or Samson or the rest. I shouldn't be surprised. Judges has very vivid stories that are fit only for horror movies. This link below tells you when a scripture will be read in the three-year cycle of the Revised Common Lectionary - if you're curious:

Joshua 3:7-17, 5:9-12, 24:1-2a,14-18, and 24:1-3a,14-2

Judges 4:1-7 -- <https://www.lectionarypage.net/ReverseLectionary.html>

**Judges, the book:** Judges describes a period of social chaos. The book's recurring theme is the cycle of sin, oppression, repentance, and deliverance, where the Israelites repeatedly fail and beg for help.

**Leadership contrast: Joshua:** a strong, centralized leader leading Israel with authority as they enter and conquer the Promised Land. **Judges:** features a series of judges who are ad hoc warriors raised up by God to deliver Israel from its enemies.

**Relationship with God: Joshua:** God is portrayed as a warrior fighting for Israel and Joshua is a mirror of that divinity. **Judges:** Israel cries out for deliverance while in the land. In Judges, the victorious entry into the Canaan was more of a dumpster fire almost from the moment they set foot on the soil.

**Outcome: Joshua:** The book ends on a positive note, with the land largely conquered and distributed among the tribes, and the Israelites recommitting to serve God. **Judges:** The book ends in chaos setting the stage for the people to demand a King like Joshua, but they get Saul (dud is an understatement).

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Why am I filling your eyes with this history? Because we live in a time of relative calm, but many believe we live in a time of American chaos. The Bible includes clarity and chaos to give us a sense that living in community needs Joshua's vision and Judges' reality check. Neither stand alone. And we are stronger when we approach this tension with humility and grace. Stanley Hauerwas is one of my favorite theologians because he is a gifted academic and believer in the church *and* one who loves the most profane jokes in his public talks.

*"The church is constituted as a new people who have been gathered from the nations to remind the world that we are in fact one people. Gathering, therefore, is an eschatological act as it is the foretaste of the unity of the communion of the saints."* – Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis*

As a church, let's pray for the eyes to see a big vision and the hands to do the messy work. **Todd**