
Joshua: God's People in God's Land
 "Large and Startling Figures"
 Joshua 7

Thoughts to Shape and Spark Discussion:

"Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbi Dei" ("the church is Reformed and always [in need of] being reformed according to the Word of God") - Jodocus van Lodenstein

"The awareness of sin used to be our shadow. Christians hated sin, feared it, fled from it, grieved over it. Some of our grandparents agonized over their sins. A man who lost his temper might wonder whether he could go to Holy Communion. A woman who for years envied her more attractive and intelligent sister might worry that this sin threatened her very salvation. But the shadow has dimmed. Nowadays, the accusation you have sinned is often said with a grin, and with a tone that signals an inside joke. At one time, this accusation still had the power to jolt people. Catholics lined up to confess their sins; Protestant preachers rose up to confess our sins. And they did it regularly . . . The word sin now finds its home mostly on dessert menus. "Peanut Butter Binge" and "Chocolate Challenge" are sinful; lying is not. The new measure for sin is caloric." - Cornelius Plantinga

"Redemption is meaningless unless there is cause for it in the actual life we live, and for the last few centuries there has been operating in our culture the secular belief that there is no such cause . . . The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to this hostile audience . . . Writers who see by the light of their Christian faith will have, in these times, the sharpest eye for the grotesque, for the perverse, and for the unacceptable.... To the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures." - Flannery O'Connor

Themes and Questions to Guide Reflection and Response:

- What from the Scripture passage or the sermon made an impression upon you? Are there lingering questions to be answered or rabbit trails to be followed for you?
- What is God showing you about Himself and yourself in this passage?
- O'Connor speaks of "large and startling figures" and needing to "shout" to get folks to see evil and sin in our midst and in our hearts.
 - Culturally, where do you see evil being seen as "natural" and normal?
 - Personally, where do you sense yourself "hard of hearing" and "almost-blind" to the reality of sin and evil in our world, in our hearts?
 - What have you/we learned to live with? What have you/we become accustomed to?
- Why is remembering that sin is a personal affront to God and not merely breaking a rule so crucial for this passage and for our lives?
- How is sin also a covenantal/communal act?
 - How did Achan's sin connect and effect the people of God?
 - Is this unfair?
 - Is there really no such thing as sinning in isolation? Why?
- If sin works through one representing and tainting the many, how does grace work in reverse?
 - How can God turn the Valley of Achor into a place of hope (Hosea 2:15)?
 - What trouble are you wanting to see become the doorway to resurrection hope?