

Sermon Manuscript for Matins, May 20, 2016

Just War Conference

Preacher: Rev. Travis Berg, Pastor at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Latimer, IA

Text: Numbers 27:12-23

12 Now the Lord said to Moses: "Go up into this Mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel. 13 And when you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was gathered. 14 For in the Wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to hallow Me at the waters before their eyes." (These are the waters of Meribah, at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin.) 15 Then Moses spoke to the Lord, saying: 16 "Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, 17 who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd." 18 And the Lord said to Moses: "Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; 19 set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. 20 And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. 21 He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the Lord for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him—all the congregation." 22 So Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. 23 And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses.

You are replaceable. And Numbers 27 shows it. Here, we see the changing of the guard. Moses steps down and passes the heavy mantle of leadership to Joshua. In today's reading, we see the temporal and the spiritual kingdoms united in one man. Joshua is prophet and king. The Word of the Lord comes to him. Also king. He leads the armies of Israel into the land of Canaan. He smote 31 kings of Canaan and put their people to the sword. He settled the tribes in Israel in their allotted territory. But this great work is in the future. Today, Moses' helper becomes Moses' successor.

We need to hear this text because we often suffer from hubris, the sin of pride. We ask ourselves, How can I ever leave my parish? How can they ever get along without me? Sometimes, there's no choice in the matter. We all have our Mount Abarim. For every pastor, for every magistrate, for every calling which God has ordained, there will be the end of the line. Moses needs a successor because he is a sinner. Sinners die.

Replaceable doesn't mean nonessential. Replaceable doesn't mean that everyone is uniform. Moses was better than Joshua. **"But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face."** (Deut. 34:10) There are pastors you look up to more than others. There are magistrates who are better rulers than others.

But remember Paul's words: **"And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"** (1 Cor. 4:7) Moses was the greatest prophet, except for Jesus, who ever lived. How did he spend his ministry? The successes were few and far between. Forty years of dealing with an unbelieving people. Forty years of slander and murmuring. Forty years of pulling out the weed of idolatry and seeing two more weeds take its place. And finally, when the next generation is trained, pious and ready, Moses is told by God to move on.

Moses had to live by faith too. He didn't see the conquest. He didn't see God fulfill all of His promises. In the same way, when we take God's call to another congregation or when we step down due to infirmity or death, we too trust that God will fulfill His promises, that He will send another shepherd to lead His people.

Perhaps you are a great luminary, a Moses of sorts, with many gifts and talents. Remember, every pious widow you bury, every time you commune the shut-in, every time you preach to your people, you did not start this. In fact, another Old Testament reference works well here. You live in **“large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant.”** The pastors before you, no matter how weak and strange, preached and taught, baptized and communed. In many cases, we reap where we did not sow, just as Joshua did.

Perhaps you are not so great and talented. Perhaps you are as feeble as the light of a candle is to the noonday sun when you compare yourself with your predecessors and even a few of our brothers here. Remember God’s words to Moses: **“At [Joshua’s] word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in... all the congregation.”** When your word is conformed to God’s Word, then the congregation doesn’t just hear your words, they hear God’s Words. You preach by God’s command and God’s promise. You are His shepherd, called and ordained to shepherd God’s congregation.

You are replaceable. But thanks be to God that God has **“set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.”** This Man can never be replaced. This is no mere man; He is the God of Spirits who has come in the flesh. He sees His storm tossed little flock. He sees that they are like sheep without a shepherd, and He has compassion on us poor, unworthy sinners. And this God Man bears in Himself all three offices mentioned today. He is the Prophet like Moses and yet greater, for Moses was a servant but Jesus is a Son.

This Man bears a better Priesthood than Eleazar, who received it when his father Aaron died. This Man’s priesthood will never end: **“The Lord has sworn And will not relent, “You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.”** He does not need to inquire of Urim in order to know the Father’s Will, for He has descended from heaven and knows His Father’s will perfectly. And this Man does not need to sacrifice for his own sin, but His once for all sacrifice atones for every sinner and provides salvation for those who cling to Him in faith. And this Man is King over all things: **“The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”** All authority is His in heaven and earth. No monarch will ever break Christ’s rule. No petty chieftain or upstart president can ever dispute This Man’s suzerainty. Jesus’ name is a Greek transliteration for the Hebrew name Joshua. Joshua was an instrument by which the LORD saved His people; but Jesus is the Author and Perfecter of a perfect, complete salvation.

This Man, this better Joshua, having rescued us from sin, death and the devil and having made the perfect Sacrifice for sin, now rules for our benefit. And He doesn’t want us to be sheep without a shepherd. And so, He sends Moses and Joshua, Samuel and Elijah, John the Forerunner, Peter, Paul, and yes, your pastor. The faces may change, but Jesus Christ remains the same yesterday, today and forever. And He gives His unchanging forgiveness and His eternal life to sinners by the hand of other sinful

shepherds. May God grant us humility to see that we are replaceable and may we cling all the more firmly to Jesus, the Man who shepherds His people and causes them to go in and to go out by His Word.

Amen. May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.