

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Tenth Sunday After Trinity, August 16, 2020

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 8 (246:1) 491, 482, 283

Lessons: Psalm 75:4-7; Hebrews 4:9-13; Matthew 12:1-8

Text: Numbers 27:12-23

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

An important matter concerning the leadership of Israel is recorded in our text. Moses' life was coming to an end and a new leader had to be chosen. This was not a matter of someone being elected by the people, but something that God would do. Israel was God's chosen people. This was made known by God when he told Abraham, ***"I will make you into a great nation,"*** Genesis 12:2. And when Abraham came into Canaan, the Lord told him, ***"To your offspring I will give this land,"*** Genesis 12:7. We in our land have a democracy with a president elected by the people. Israel was a theocracy (Theos is the Greek word for God) because God ruled over them directly and because God chose the leadership of Israel.

Concerning the government of nations, God declares, ***"By me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just; by me princes govern, and all nobles who rule on earth,"*** Proverbs 8:15-16. The Bible also tells us, ***"He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them,"*** Daniel 2:21. It is for this reason that God requires our obedience to the government he has ordained. ***"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God,"*** Romans 13:1.

The change of leadership in Israel was all the more important because it involved the spiritual welfare of Israel. We should also remember that Christ rules over his Church in our day and provides it with spiritual leadership in the person of pastors and teachers.

We learn all these things as we consider,

A CHANGE IN ISRAEL'S LEADERSHIP

- 1. God tells Moses that his life is coming to an end;**
- 2. God appoints Joshua as the new leader of his people.**

Moses was a very special person, not just another leader of God's people. Moses was chosen by the Lord to lead Israel out of captivity in Egypt. Moses led Israel through the Red Sea. Moses received the Ten Commandments from God on Mt. Sinai to give to the people of Israel. God reminded Aaron and Miriam of Moses' special position when they were jealous of Moses' leadership and tried to challenge it. God said, ***"With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles."*** God also admonished Aaron and Miriam, asking, ***"Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses,"*** Numbers 12:8. We are told, ***"The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them,"*** v. 9.

Later on when Moses had been the leader of Israel for forty years, God told him, ***"Go up this mountain in the Abarim range and see the land I have given the Israelites. After you have seen it, you too will be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was."*** Aaron also did not enter the Promised Land of Canaan

and died at the age of 123. Moses was told that he could view the Promised Land, but not enter it. That Moses was told that he would soon die was not outstanding news. Moses was 120 years old. More importantly, death is the result of sin. God told Adam and Eve when he gave them the commandment not to eat of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden that they would be subject to death when they disobeyed his commandment. ***“You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die,”*** Genesis 3:3. All people are subject to death. Paul writes, ***“Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned,”*** Romans 5:12. ***“The wages of sin is death,”*** Romans 6:23.

The importance of this message from the Lord to Moses is that Moses found out he would not enter the Promised Land. What a disappointment! The leader of Israel would not enter into the land to which he had led the people during a period of 40 years! Just as Aaron, his brother, had died, so Moses would die before entering Canaan. They both were ***“gathered to (their) people.”*** That is a way of saying that Moses and Aaron died in the faith and would join the other believers who died before them to live forever in eternity.

God told Moses why he and Aaron could not enter Canaan. ***“When the community rebelled at the waters in the Desert of Zin, both of you disobeyed my command to honor me as holy before their eyes.’ (These were the waters of Meribah in Kadesh, in the Desert of Zin.)”*** This incident is recorded in the twentieth chapter of Numbers. The Israelites complained that they had no water to drink in the Desert of Zin. God then mercifully provided water, even though the people did not deserve any help because of their sinful murmuring. The Lord commanded Moses to gather the Israelites together and to speak to the rock out of which the water would come. God said, ***“Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water,”*** Numbers 20:8. Moses and Aaron angered the Lord, ***“for they rebelled against the Spirit of God, and rash words came from Moses’ lips,”*** Psalm 106:33. Moses said, ***“Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock? Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff,”*** Numbers 20:10-11. The Lord then told Moses and Aaron, ***“Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them,”*** Numbers 20:12.

However, God granted this favor to Moses that he could see the land of Canaan from a distance before he died. Our text tells us how God commanded Moses to come to the range of mountains called Abarim and there from this high point he could see the good land the Lord was giving to Israel. After that God brought Moses’ life to an end and God buried him on Mt. Nebo of the Abarim range of mountains.

We may learn this lesson from God telling Moses that he would soon die. He did not tell Moses when he would die, and thus gave him time to get his house in order. We too should consider it a blessing when the Lord gives us ample time to prepare spiritually before body and soul are separated in death. For only those who are prepared to die by trusting in Jesus as their Savior will live in heaven forever and ever.

We may also learn from what happened at the waters of Meribah in the Desert of Zin that God does not permit his glory to be diminished by what we do or say. God tells us, ***“I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols,”*** Isaiah 42:8. In all that we as believers in Christ do, our aim should not be our glory and honor, but as Paul writes, ***“Let him who boasts boast in the Lord,”*** 1 Corinthians 1:31.

“Moses said to the LORD, ‘May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the LORD’S people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.’” Moses spoke wisely in describing the work of the new leader as one who would lead the people out and bring them in so that they would not be like sheep without a shepherd. As sheep need a shepherd to guide them, so also God’s people need a shepherd. We want to learn now **that God appointed Joshua as the new leader of his people.**

God gave these instructions to Moses, ***“Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence.”*** Joshua was the proper man to lead Israel because God had given him the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and thus gave him the necessary qualifications to be a good leader of God’s people. Joshua was to be installed into his office publicly before all the congregation of Israel. Moses would lay his hand on Joshua in consecrating him for this office as leader of Israel. In the presence of all the people Moses was to tell Joshua what his duties were. This was also done before Eleazar who was the High Priest in charge of the worship and spiritual affairs of Israel.

The Lord also gave Moses these instructions, ***“Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him. He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the Lord. At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in.”*** Joshua was not in absolute control of the people. He had to seek advice from Eleazar the priest who received his judgments from the Lord. The Urim and Thummin were worn in the breastplate of the robe of the High Priest. The words mean revelation and truth. The Lord therefore was the true Leader of his people and Joshua received wisdom and judgments through the office of the High Priest.

Let us now apply some of these things to our day. The Lord calls those whom he wants in the church in official positions. We are speaking of pastors, teachers, and officers of the congregation. He does this through the Christian congregation. When these men have been called they are installed in office publicly. During the rite of installation a charge is given them. Their duties and responsibilities are read so that all the people may know what is expected of them. The laying on of hands in such an installation symbolizes the giving of the Lord’s blessings for their work.

For the pastor especially our text is a reminder that he is to be a shepherd of souls. This is brought out in Jesus’ words to Peter when he was reinstated as an apostle. The Lord told him, ***“Feed my lambs! ... Take care of my sheep,”*** John 21:15,16. This feeding and caring is done by proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. ***“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God,”*** Isaiah 40:1. The pastor as a shepherd of souls is to show his love and concern by faithfully preaching this message. He also is to warn against the sins and evils that are harmful to the souls of his hearers. Paul wrote, ***“Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood,”*** Acts 20:28.

For the members of the congregation our text is a reminder that the Lord wants those he has chosen to serve the congregation to be given the honor and respect that their office calls for. That is best shown when the members listen to their pastor and do according to the Word of God he preaches. ***“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”*** James 1:22.

So we pray in the words of the hymn writer,
*“Oh, may Thy pastors faithful be,
 Not lab’ring for themselves, but Thee!
 Give grace to feed with wholesome food
 The sheep and lambs bought by Thy blood.”*

*Oh, may Thy people faithful be
 And in Thy pastors honor Thee
 And with them work and for them pray
 And gladly Thee in them obey.”* (The Lutheran Hymnal 493) Amen.