

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash.
October 23, 2011**

Different Gifts, Same Grace” – Week 4

Joshua 1:6-9

Is It Really That Simple?

Hymns: 478 – 444 – Closing: 523 (vv.1-2)

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

What do you think of when you hear, “Leader?” There are really a thousand different ways that it could go. Perhaps you think of people who are known as great leaders. It might be presidents, kings, coaches, CEOs, or bosses. Many of those leaders probably share similar traits, so perhaps when you think of leader, your mind goes instead to ideal characteristics that define great leaders: strength, diligence, eloquence, forward thinking. Or maybe your mind goes to the perks that big time leaders often enjoy: prestige, power, notoriety, money. Or maybe on the other end of things, your mind goes to the perceived negatives of being a leader: endless cares to deal with, complaints from unhappy people, added time commitments, burdens that come with needing to make tough decisions. There are many thoughts that the word “leader” can bring to mind, but perhaps, when many of you hear leader, the first thing that comes to your mind is simply this: “Not me.”

Whether it be selfless humility, or a perceived lack of gifts, or a desire to sit back in the peripheral for any number of reasons, it doesn’t take too much convincing to look

out in a church with over 500 members and a school with 140 kids and a budget in the upper 6 digits and say, “I don’t need or want to be a leader here.” It is easy to assume that there are many who are more qualified, who are more respected, who would be more apt to make the big decisions. It is easy to shy away from the difficult decisions and the controversial topics and say that someone else is going to have to take those on. It is easy to look at church leadership and say, “I really don’t want to have anything to do with that role.”

Don’t you think those might’ve been the very words Joshua was thinking when God came to him and said, “You are now leader of the people of Israel?”

Think about what Joshua was staring in the face. In the scope of OT history, we are at the very end of the Exodus of the children of Israel. After toiling in slavery in Egypt 400 years, they had been led out by the power of God Almighty under the leadership of Moses. That had led them into 40 years of wandering through the desert and Joshua had been with them for all of those 40 years. That meant that he had seen all that the Israelites were capable of during that time. He had been in the camp and heard the constant complaining about the food and water and living conditions in the desert. He had heard the people at one moment telling Moses that they would follow without complaint; then grumbling about every word he had to say to them. Alarmingly, he had also seen how quickly they would turn from God, thinking about the time when they thought Moses was dead and they had turned to worshipping a golden calf. Being leader of people like that would certainly be no picnic.

And perhaps the most troubling part was that all that happened when Moses was around. Now that Moses – the man who had stood up to Pharaoh and led them out of slavery, the man who brought them to the

brink of the Promised Land, the man who wrote the first five books of the Bible, the man whom the Bible says knew the Lord face to face – now that this man was dead, would things get worse? As they headed into a time of conquest, with many battles on the horizon, would these two million people fold up and turn on him when adversity struck? This was really a turning point in the entire history of the people of Israel and it's not hard to think that Joshua might have been a little cool on the idea of leadership when God brought it up.

And that probably explains what we see in this powerful text from the first chapter of the Book of Joshua. Whereas we heard all the doubts and concerns which Moses had when God called him to be leader of his people, when the call came for Joshua, we don't hear from Joshua at all. Instead we only hear what God has to say about Joshua's new role.

For Joshua, he kept the message simple. ***Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.*** (Joshua 1:6-9) It isn't too difficult to find a theme in that pep talk from God. Three times he uses the phrase, "Be strong and courageous!" This was definitely a most challenging time for Joshua as he tried to replace someone who was seemingly irreplaceable, but the message was simple:

be strong. He didn't need to shy away from what stood before him. He didn't need to be afraid; he didn't need to be worried. That's what God was telling him, but how could he believe that? He knew how volatile the people were. Was he up to the challenge? Was he a good enough leader? Could he handle the adversity? Would the people listen to him? What if he messed up? What if he wasn't strong enough, smart enough, good enough? Look again at what God told Joshua. He didn't say anything about any of those worries. In fact, he didn't focus on Joshua at all – on how good of a leader he was, or could be, or on what he had done, or could do. He didn't point Joshua to Joshua. He pointed Joshua to God and his promises. How could Joshua know that he would be able to do all of this? Because, God said so. God had promised that his people would inherit this land, and now he was promising Joshua that he would be the one to lead them in the conquest. God had promised it, and that's all he needed. And that's the reason he could be strong and courageous.

And trusting in God's promises is the key for any Christian leader, whether it be a church president or an elder or a Bible study leader or a parent. How important that is for all of us to remember. When we think about any kind of service, but especially leadership, most of us have a tendency to put the burden on ourselves. It can be so tempting to look to our gifts and rely on what we are able to do. It can be tempting to think that we have all the answers. It can be tempting to think that nothing will be accomplished if our voice isn't heard. On the other end of things, it can be easy to think that the person who is in charge doesn't have the right gifts. It can be easy to doubt the plans. It can be easy to question decisions. If we want to analyze and breakdown human leaders, we could spend all day pointing out flaws and mistakes and shortcomings. If we are looking for the

perfect candidate to lead us in the church, we are going to be looking for a long time. Instead, we ask men to use the gifts that they have been given. We ask men to lead as diligently as possible. We ask men to make prudent decisions. But, most of all, we ask them to be men of God. A Christian leader and a Christian follower is a person who realizes the many faults that are inherent in people and doesn't dwell on them but looks to God. A Christian leader's greatest attribute is unwavering faith, and dedication to God's promises.

This section of Joshua reminds all of us, but especially leaders, to look to the Lord. And more than anything, it reminds us what leaders should be doing. Since the foundation of leadership is on God's promises, it is imperative that Christian leaders, and also Christian followers, be found in the Word. That was part of God's encouragement to Joshua as well. ***Do not let this book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night.*** God says the same thing to us today as he said to Joshua all those years ago. Christian leaders must be in the Word regularly. That's the only place we find the guidance on where to lead. That's the only place we find strength no matter what lies before us. That's the only place we find Christ's forgiveness for all the times we fail, and the only place we can find reason to offer forgiveness to others. To strengthen our own faith and to find strength to lead in the ways that God would have us go, Christian leaders need to be constantly in the Word.

And the same could be said to those who aren't in positions of leadership. The Word needs to be in your life, day and night. It's the only place where you will find the humbleness to follow. It is the only place where you will find the comfort to trust when you are unsure. It is the only place where you will find the confidence that God's Will will be done.

What God tells Joshua in these verses were spoken directly to a man who was about to lead, but they were recorded for all of us to read and take to heart. Whatever you may be facing, whatever you may be struggling with, be strong and courageous. Don't give up! Don't be afraid! Don't become discouraged! Trust in God's promises. As you continue to meditate on his Word, he will continue to give you the peace of forgiveness through Jesus, the joy of a new relationship with him and the hope of an eternity with him in heaven. If you are a leader, lead with courage. If you are not, follow with conviction. And through it all, know that the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. Amen.