

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
July 1, 2012**

Numbers 27:12-23

**Let's Learn from a Touching Account of
Moses**

- 1. A lesson about God's justice**
- 2. A lesson about shepherds**
- 3. A lesson about grace**

**Hymns: As the Deer – 290 – Distribution: 362, 309
– Closing: 619**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Numbers 27:12-23 –

¹² Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go up this mountain in the Abarim range and see the land I have given the Israelites." ¹³ After you have seen it, you too will be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was, ¹⁴ for 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 Kadesh, in the Desert of Zin.)

¹⁵ Moses said to the LORD, ¹⁶ "May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community ¹⁷ 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."

¹⁸ So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him. ¹⁹ Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. ²⁰ Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him. ²¹ 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."

²² Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. ²³ Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, as the LORD instructed through Moses.

It really is a touching account. The words which I'm going to read in a few moments occur when the children of Israel are almost there. They have wandered in the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula for forty years. They have traveled around Edom on the home stretch. They have come to Moab and are nearing their entry point. They are almost there!

Then in Numbers 26, a census of the Israelites is taken. The purpose is to begin thinking about how to divide the Promised Land for their permanent home. Larger tribes and groups will receive larger portions. Smaller tribes and groups will receive smaller portions.

Then in Numbers 27, five daughters of a deceased man named Zelophehad come forward and ask what their inheritance will be. The male leader of their family is dead, so in the present arrangement they will not be allotted any of the land. They ask, "Can we receive an inheritance too?" Moses brings their question before the Lord. The answer is yes, an exception can be made in the case of daughters who do not have a male living as their family head. They can have an inheritance too! It is an exciting time as the nation looks forward to its entry into the land that the Lord is giving them.

Then we come across the words of our text: (Read above)

Moses will not be leading the children of Israel into the Promised Land. He will not be receiving an inheritance to call his own there. **We have much that we can learn from this account this morning. Let's do so, as we examine this touching account today. We will learn:**

- 1. A lesson about God's justice**
- 2. A lesson about shepherds**
- 3. A lesson about grace**

1. A lesson in God's justice

Questions arise in our minds as we see what God decreed in this reading: Why wouldn't Moses be able to enter the Promised Land? Why would he not be receiving an inheritance to call his own?

After all, Moses had been a dedicated servant of the Lord. He had served him and his people for decades. He had stood up to Pharaoh with God's signs and God's devastating plagues, as our Bible class will cover today. He had victoriously led the nation through the Red Sea. He had received God's very commandments and laws at Mt. Sinai. He had spoken with the Lord personally. He had faithfully led the children of Israel during all those years in the wilderness. Why was Moses being left out of the grand entrance into Canaan?

The Lord tells him why. It was because of a sin that he and Aaron had committed along the way. What was this sin? And why was the Lord so severe in his chastening judgment?

The incident happened in Numbers 20. To understand this whole situation, we must read what exactly had happened: *"In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried. Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. They quarreled with Moses and said, 'If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the LORD! Why did you bring the LORD's community into this desert, that we and our livestock should die here? Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!'*

Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and fell facedown, and the glory of the LORD appeared to them. The LORD said to Moses, 'Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the

community so they and their livestock can drink.'

So Moses took the staff from the LORD's presence, just as he commanded him. He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, '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. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. But the LORD said to 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.' "

That was it. Where had Moses gone wrong? The first thing that you probably recognize is that Moses did not follow the simple instructions that God had given to him. God simply said to speak to the rock; Moses had struck it twice.

A second thing might jump out at you. Psalm 106, in recounting this incident, says, *"By the waters of Meribah they angered the LORD, and trouble came to Moses because of them; for they rebelled against the Spirit of God, and rash words came from Moses' lips."* Moses spoke harshly to the people ("You rebels!"). Perhaps you have had a time when you could feel your anger coming up, the red flush on your neck or forehead, and you said or did something you regretted later.

Moses also said, *"Must we bring you water out of this rock?"* Those words make us pause. "We?" Whose glory and whose show was this, anyway? Moses'? Moses did not give glory to the right place.

Finally, we also see an interesting editorial on this incident in the NT book of 1 Corinthians: *"Our forefathers were all under the cloud and... they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ." (10:1-4)* Whom did that

spiritual rock foreshadow? Whom did it point forward to? Christ! God intended this to be an illustration to the children of Israel about his grace to them as undeserving people. He intended it as a gospel picture of Christ, the living water, relieving the thirst of the guilty sinner. He did not intend this to be a harsh lesson to them at this time. Moses in his personal frustration did not represent that illustration at all as he struck their "spiritual rock."

Therefore, God decreed that due to this sin of Moses he would not enter the Promised Land. And it would be a visible lesson to the Israelites, who would watch Moses ascend the mountain never to come back down to them.

What a lesson we see here in the seriousness of sin before God. I think that the fact that we are so tainted and ruined by sin can make us lose sight of that fact many days. With the countless sins that we commit, it sure doesn't seem so serious after a while. Phrases like "I'm just looking," "That's just the way I am," or "I didn't hurt anybody" can flow from our lips pretty easily.

Sometimes sin has deep consequences:

- Imagine the guilt of a person who was "just going a little bit too fast" through the neighborhood and hit the child on the bike. Suddenly, the sin has deeper implications.
- Or the 32-year old woman on June 8 who was driving north on Pacific Highway in Federal Way at 11:00 p.m. Under the influence of drugs or alcohol, she was driving with her lights off and crossed the center line, killing a 48-year old woman. Suddenly, the seriousness of sin is felt much more deeply.

Be reminded today that God doesn't gauge sin lightly or seriously. It is all damning in his eyes. You don't deserve to go to the Promised Land. If Moses doesn't get in by his works, who in the world does? No one is immune from the justice

of God, you included. What a lesson we see in God's justice in this account of Moses.

2. A lesson about shepherds

More lessons are here for us to learn. We see another lesson in what future plans are for leadership over God's people. Moses prayed, *"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."* This is a remarkable prayer that Moses prayed! He does not plead his case or complain. Rather, his thoughts drift to God's people and what will happen to them after he is gone.

God has a plan. *"The LORD said 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. 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 will be the successor of Moses. He certainly was a good choice. He had been one of the 12 spies that had originally scouted out the land, and he and Caleb were the only two that had expressed confidence that God would hand it over to them. He had been Moses' assistant for a time. And as God says here, the Spirit was in him. A spiritual man would be the best choice to lead this people! This would be the plan after Moses was gone.

We see lessons about shepherds in this part of the account, three of them, in fact:

- 1) **Shepherds are needed for God's people in the Church.** Moses, who knew the power of God to lead and protect his people better than anyone

else in the world, still knew how true that was. It's estimated that about 2½ million people needed leadership, safety, and spiritual guidance during his ministry. We hear that Moses even served as their judge for their disputes (which caused him to delegate authority to others eventually).

Shepherds (pastors) are still needed to lead God's flock. Ephesians 4 says, *"It was (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming."* Pastors are needed to teach and guide doctrinally. Pastors are needed to personally counsel and guide. Pastors are needed in order to keep good order and organization.

- 2) **We also see that shepherds in God's kingdom are different.** Joshua would not be a clone of Moses. As we read, he would not speak with God face to face, but would use the "Urim" to inquire of God. This was a form of "casting lots" in the OT to find out God's will. He also would not have the same assignment. Moses led during the Exodus and the wilderness wandering. Joshua would lead them into the land and would organize its conquest. He brought a different personality and gifts to his ministry. He was not Moses.

Pastors today have different gifts, serving at different times in a church's history. Perhaps you've seen the portraits of the Holy Trinity pastors on the wall by the lobby steps. Those are

different men with different abilities for different times, yet who served with the same Word. Times of a small group, times of starting a school, times of building, and more. God had the right shepherd here at the right times.

- 3) **We also see that shepherds are temporary. They do not last. They are not "what it's about."** Even Moses, the greatest prophet of the OT, was not what it was about! It was only about the Word, the message of God that the Church is based on!

3. A lesson about grace

This is a great thought to bring us into the last part of this sermon. Our reading has one other lesson for us. We also learn a lesson about God's grace at the end of Moses' life.

At the end of the book of Deuteronomy we hear more about Moses' view of the Promised Land: *"Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the LORD showed him the whole land—from Gilead to Dan, all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. Then the LORD said to him, "This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes..."*

God in his mercy allowed Moses to see the beautiful, blessed Promised Land that he had led God's people to. What grace!

Yet how is there even more grace? How do we see grace in the fact that the shepherd, the mediator of Israel who has interceded for them with the Lord, must die alone on a mountain? Listen to what Scripture says about a shepherd that had many similar circumstances:

- *“I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10)*
- *“May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will...” (Hebrews 13)*
- *“Shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.” (Acts 20)*

May we remember these lessons well, and may we thank our Lord who leads us and our Good Shepherd who has saved us! Amen.

It does seem a bit coincidental that the name “Joshua” (Yeshua) is the Hebrew name for “Jesus.” This account of Moses has some similarities with a Good Shepherd named Yeshua who would one day succeed him. Jesus, the Mediator for God’s people, would die on a hill outside the city. By the One who also had compassion in viewing God’s people as “sheep without a shepherd,” the forgiveness of sins would be won at Calvary’s cross. **Because of him, Moses would enter the Promised Land. By the blood of the One who did never sin in his Heavenly Father’s sight, Moses’ sins would be paid for and he would enter eternal life.**

The same Jesus, your Good Shepherd, is the only Way that you can also enter the Promised Land. He was cut off from the Promised Land and experienced hell for you. He would cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” as he suffers what you deserve – On a hill outside the city. By his sacrifice on the cross as your substitute, your sins have been paid for and you may go into heaven, in the same way that the sinner Moses was transferred to the presence of the God that he had worshiped and followed. In a touching story today, this lesson about grace is probably the most touching part of all.

What deep lessons we have learned from a touching story about the end of Moses’ life:

1. **A lesson in God’s justice**
2. **A lesson about shepherds**
3. **A lesson about grace**