

<sup>15</sup> Moses said to the LORD, <sup>16</sup> “May the LORD, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community <sup>17</sup> 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.” <sup>18</sup> So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit of leadership, and lay your hand on him. <sup>19</sup> Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. <sup>20</sup> Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him. <sup>21</sup> 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.” <sup>22</sup> Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. <sup>23</sup> Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, as the LORD instructed through Moses.

### LIKE SHEEP WITH A SHEPHERD

Good Shepherd Sunday is a favorite service for God’s people. Good Shepherd Sunday doesn’t have the glow of Christmas Eve Candlelight service. And Good Shepherd Sunday doesn’t come with the anticipation of a Holy Week and Easter Sunrise service. Like the Festival of Pentecost, Good Shepherd Sunday can sneak up on God’s people in a way where you did really know it was Good Shepherd Sunday until all the songs and readings were about Jesus as our Good Shepherd.

Today, in case you’re wondering, is NOT Good Shepherd Sunday. Good Shepherd Sunday is held during the festival half of the Church Year. During the festival half of the Church Year the focus is on Christ. It’s not that, us, Christians aren’t important. We are in the picture, but the focus on Christ. Over the last couple of weeks we have entered into the non-festival half of the Church Year. During the non-festival half of the Church Year the focus is on Christian life or the Church. Christ is still in the picture. In fact, Jesus as our Good Shepherd is clearly in the background today, but the focus is on the Church, specifically the church shepherding the church, or even more specifically pastors shepherding people. At its best this pastor and people relationship is like sheep with and shepherd so pray. Pray for a faithful pastor and pray for a following people.

#### 1. Pray for a faithful pastor.

Just as the festival-half to the non-festival half is a major shift in the Church Year so also our text from the book of Numbers presents a major shift. For the last forty years Moses had been the shepherd for the nation of Israel and Moses was a faithful shepherd. Verse 22 of our text it says, “*Moses did as the Lord commanded him*”. Ironically, 22 times in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers the Bible connects Moses with doing as the Lord commanded him. In the New Testament, the book of Hebrews confirms Moses has a faithful servant in God’s house.

And yet Moses, though faithful, wasn’t perfect. Earlier in Numbers chapter 20, Moses was told to speak to a rock, but in a moment of frustration Moses hit that rock with a staff. And as a result of that singular transgression, what many might consider a minor infraction, the Lord clearly told Moses he would not be allowed to enter into the Promised Land of Canaan.

And when the Lord made the matter abundantly clear to Moses that he wouldn’t change his mind, Moses shifted his focus from trying to get himself into the Promised Land of Canaan to praying for the next shepherd who would take the people of Israel into the Promised Land. Let’s hear this prayer again. *<sup>15</sup> Moses said to the LORD, <sup>16</sup> “May the LORD, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community <sup>17</sup> 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 prayer had an immediate answer. The text continues, *“18 So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit of leadership, 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.”*

Joshua seems like a logical choice. Joshua had demonstrated faithfulness to the Lord and to Moses. And yet it's striking, isn't it, when the Lord calls for Joshua to be the next shepherd of the Israelites, the Lord isn't calling Joshua to be the next Moses. Did you catch how Joshua was only going to receive *some* of the authority that was given to Moses? Moses could talk to the Lord like we talk to our friends, but Joshua would have to work with Eleazar the priest to learn what the Lord would want him to do.

On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of the pastors, male teachers and congregational delegates of the Arizona / California District of the Wisconsin Synod met in convention. That's a lot of people. That's a lot of pastors. And just as there was a difference in authority and ability between Moses and Joshua, there are differences with every single pastor that was at the convention. We are not the same. But the good news for pastors and the good news for all people who have been called to serve publicly in church, is the Good Shepherd, the husband of the church, the one serving us in the background, behind the scenes right now, works all things for the good of God's people, including the pastors and called workers he has positioned to shepherd the congregations and the classrooms. And not only is the Good Shepherd watching over those shepherds, the Good Shepherd is also watching over and cultivating the shepherds who will come after them.

So pray for pastors. Pray for a faithful pastor, one who will care for God's people through the faithful preaching and teaching of God's Word and the administration of sacraments. Pray for a faithful pastor, but also pray for a following people.

## 2. Pray for a following people.

How do you think Moses reacted to the news of Joshua and the lesser authority Joshua would have than Moses had? I suppose, on one hand, Moses could have had the same feeling that any sinner with an ego has. Glad they will have a shepherd, but also glad that he was the more talented shepherd. However, on the other hand, Moses could have also worried with good reason, on how these sheep would follow a less authoritative shepherd when the Israelites spent so much time grumbling and complaining and rebelling against Moses. Even Moses sister and brother, one time participated in a rebellion.

I can't quite picture how Moses would have reacted to hearing this news about Joshua as shepherd, but depending on the time of day I am confident Moses lost his lunch when he heard about the people Joshua would serve. Did you catch how the Lord prophesied about the relationship between Joshua and this generation of Israelites? The Lord closes out his answer to Moses prayer with these words: *“At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in.”*

What?! A following people? And yet as you page through the book of Joshua this afternoon, you will find a people who followed this less authoritative shepherd and enjoyed a long life in the Promised Land of Canaan as did the generation after them until the time of the Judges.

I know I need to shoehorn a message of ministry recruitment in here. Moses prays for a shepherd. Jesus prays for workers. And what a time to a humble brag about our congregation. Grace is on a 5-year streak of sending at least one of our members to Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota,

our college of ministry. Oh, you betcha, I don't go around bragging at convention about this streak, but if someone asks how things are going? Oh, we are on a 5-year streak of sending a member to Martin Luther College.

If we have a member who has it in his or her heart to serve the Lord this way, I hope this streak continues, but even better than sending our best and brightest into the full-time ministry, is a people who follow the Good Shepherd and the other shepherds he has called to do kingdom work. So pray for workers, yes, the harvest is ripe, and perhaps you are an answer to that prayer. But also pray for a following people. And if God hasn't called you to be a shepherd, then be a part of the flock that gladly accepts the care that comes with the teaching of God's Word and the administration of the sacraments.

Because you know where this leading ultimately lands. The Israelites crossed the Jordan River and made their home in the Promised Land of Canaan. The Lord Jesus with his called servants is leading us from this life to the next. And in heaven the angels always follow the will of the Father and as glorified children of God we will do the same. We can do the will of the father even now and follow the Good Shepherd even now with the strength he provides. And he provides that strength through our gospel ministry. Amen.