

Joshua 1:1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: 2 "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. 3 I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. 4 Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west. 5 No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

"Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. 7 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. 8 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. 9 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."

Dear Friends In Christ, Members and Visitors, High School Graduates,
and especially you Josh, our Confirmand,

WITH YOU, WHEREVER YOU GO

"Moses Is Dead!"

One morning, Moses (yes, the big Moses of the Bible) woke up in his tent and knew he would not see another sunrise. God had told him he would die that day. So Moses summoned Israel's leaders. He remembered and reminded them of all the good and bad of leading them for 40 years. I would love to touch the highlights of Moses' last speech, but that is not why we are here today. Our sermon text is from the next book of the Bible, Joshua. Anyway, at the end of his speech, "*Moses climbed Mount Nebo... There the LORD showed him the whole land... And Moses the servant of the LORD died there in Moab*" (Deuteronomy 34:1,5). And that was the end. Moses was no more.

When our parents leave us, we feel lost. Some of you, very sadly, lost a parent when you were very young. And it was extremely difficult. But even if you are 70 and your parent goes to his Maker at age 95, it is still troubling. Just to have that parent, that caregiver, that inspiration, that one who defined who you are—to have that person alive somehow keeps life more balanced. Their departure may be the new normal, even expected, but it is a loss.

How much more for Joshua! (I'm not yet talking about you, Josh Orta, our confirmand. I am talking of Joshua son of Nun, of our sermon text.) How distressing this day must have been! "Moses is dead." It rang through the Israelite camp. The entire nation had looked to Moses for leadership for four decades. Oh, how he had led them! Through a sea and a desert; in famine, thirst and military attack; in spite of rebellion in the ranks, he led them to the brink of their promised land. But now he was dead. Who could take over from a guy like that?

That is where your confirmation verse and our reading come in. Who could have stood up after the death of Moses and said, "Yes, I am your man. Forget about Moses, follow me!" No, Moses dies, and no one is itching to take the reins of power. Maybe the guy after the guy after Moses, but not right

after Moses. And then God taps Joshua on the shoulder, and says, “Moses is dead. Get up, cross the river, and take all these people with you.”

Joshua, Son of Nun & Josh, Son of Carlos and Dawn

Josh Orta, you are not quite in the same position. You have graduated from middle school this year, yes. You are becoming a confirmed member of this congregation today. This summer you will be moving to a new house and home in another state. But that is not quite like leading a nation of millions, or is it? It’s funny how our personal lives have a way of completely consuming our attention no matter how important or insignificant. This August, your anxiety on your first day of a high school in a new state might actually be higher than Joshua’s was. Maybe not, just saying... It is the same with our joys. As the Good Book says in Proverbs 14:10, “*Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy.*” And so these words to a leader of a nation can be exactly as meaningful to you, my dear confirmand.

Today, Josh, you find yourself in a strange situation: a sermon about a man with the same name you have. I remember being a child and hearing sermons about a guy with the same name as me. He was a likable guy, always doing well-intentioned but often dumb things. And so whenever the Apostle Peter entered the stage in a Sunday morning sermon, I had a bit of an identity crisis. I wondered if God was trying to tell me something. I sympathize, but I don’t feel sorry for you. It is a good thing to have a Biblical name, just for that reason. Once in a while someone who shares something as personal as our own name is the focus of our faith for twenty minutes. It makes you wrestle with who you are, and your relationship with God. Josh, you chose a confirmation verse spoken to the man you were named after. I think that is a splendid thing! It will be the more meaningful for the rest of your life, just because of that. Splendid, indeed!

So perhaps *it is* reasonable to draw a comparison between your life and this Joshua. Your troubles and joys will fill every corner of your heart, just as his own did for Joshua son of Nun. The Lord knows all this, and so he intended that this word of Scripture not only be for that man 34 hundred years ago, but also for you.

The Faithful God

Listen as the Lord speaks to Joshua son of Nun. He said, “***Cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses... the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.***” (2,3,6) The Lord reminds Joshua of his predecessor Moses, and farther back to Abraham. Now that is a stretch of 600 years. God had made a promise 600 years earlier, and he had been remembering it every day of those 600 years. God is faithful.

Even when we intend to be, we can’t be that faithful a week or two out. Especially parents get caught in this trap. We promise to do a family event, but someone gets sick. We plan to make this or that improvement around the house, but the money runs short. We promised to go to the pool, but the pool was closed for repairs.

Now, if we trust people who do their best, but cannot keep their promises, then how much more we should trust God. Look at how he keeps his promises! Look at how he remembers and fulfills. Look at his power to accomplish what he says.

That faithful God assures you in your chosen confirmation verse, “***Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go***” (9).

“***Your God will be with you wherever you go.***” He is faithful. That faithfulness is seen most fully in his Son Jesus Christ. In Jesus, God is not just up in heaven making promises to us—though that would be good enough by itself. In Jesus, God came to live with us. He saw the swamps and wrecks of sin that we are born into. He knew that by nature we were destined for hell. He gave himself over

to death, that we might be forgiven. We have known God's faithfulness in a way that Joshua son of Nun could not, for that first Joshua did not yet see the Savior Jesus. You have Josh!

You know the story of your family far better than I. You know how your father and mother were brought to Jesus. You know that they were brought to faith by their parents and friends. But they were not the first. They are part of a line of believers going back to Jesus, and even before him back to Joshua and back before him too. God's faithfulness was planned for you Josh, through hundreds of generations. His plan was fulfilled in the lives of your parents who have brought you to Baptism and to learn God's Word in his house.

There is, however, one word of warning here. While God's faithfulness is absolute and complete, God's power over you is not that of a slave owner. What I mean is this. God has called you to faith. He will always be there for you. He can and will strengthen you. But you are not a slave: you—may it never be so—can choose to leave God.

Meditate on the Book

That is why God not only assures Joshua, but he also gives direction. ***“Be strong and very courageous... Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so you may be careful to do everything written in it”*** (7-8). Stay close to God's Word, and you will always be close to God.

Here, I appeal with God's word, not only to you Josh, nor simply to the congregation at large, but especially to you students who have graduated from high school. Whether you are looking at college or not, you are at a milestone in life. Out high school is where you really get out there on your own, whether in college or entering the work world. Your lives will be completely reconfigured in the next couple years. What you choose to do, the friends you make, the habits you form are going to have a huge impact on your life. This is a time of great opportunity—and danger, especially spiritually. Joshua, of our reading, was at a similar turning point in life. And these were God's words to him, ***“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night.”***

Of all the questions you have to ask yourself—and I know that high school graduates have a lot of questions and are overloaded with choices—these should be some of the things you ask yourself: What am I going to do for worship when away at university? Am I going to have to work on Sundays? What sort of temptations will this or that line of work place me in? These are questions you need to ask. God's promise to be with you is valid. God will never leave you. Stay close to him.

The way for that to happen is prescribed by God in our reading, ***“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it.”*** Find a Lutheran church near your new home or university. If there isn't one, find a way to contact one. Attend worship regularly. Sometimes university students think that they can pick up their faith again on the other side – after they have completed their education, when they are less busy (that doesn't happen), or faith isn't so looked down upon (it still will be). God is faithful, but we can be unfaithful. He has been so good to you. He has given you abilities and education. Use those to his glory. He has blessed you with families that have kept you close to Christ Jesus. Stay close to him who loves you!

And you, too, Josh, in your new place, do not let your dedication to God's Word grow cold. You have had excellent attendance in catechism classes. Keep on coming back to God's Word. God is the one who has worked in you faith in your Savior. God is the one who has kept you in that faith. And by his Word, God will keep you in that faith. Hear, one more time, the verse you have chosen as your confirmation verse, spoken to another Joshua: ***“Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”*** Amen.