**9th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B – July 29, 2012 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Numbers 27:12-23 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**Jesus is the faithful leader**

1. **He gives glory to the Father**
2. **He leads his people to the Promised Land**

I had the privilege of attending a change of responsibility ceremony last week on Fort Knox. A new 1SG was taking over responsibility of a cavalry troop. The new 1SG’s wife was all smiles as she yanked his old rank off and playfully slapped the new 1SG rank onto his ACUs. Their children clapped excitedly to see daddy take over his new responsibility. But I watched the outgoing 1SG and wondered, “What about him? Where was he going? Why can’t he lead this troop anymore?” He was not all smiles.

The Holy Spirit takes us by hand and shows us a change of command ceremony in our lesson from Numbers 27 and it’s not all smiles. Moses passed the sabre on to Joshua, the new commander of the armies of Israel. What about Moses? Why can’t he lead anymore? Where will he go? It was the final year of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness. 40 years ago they had made an exodus out of Egypt, miraculously passed through the Red Sea, received the 10Commandments, and built a beautiful tent of worship for the LORD. The LORD graciously promised them a land flowing with milk and honey.

12 spies had been sent into the land for a reconnaissance mission. Ten of the spies reported, “Sorry, the people of the land are just too strong! We can’t do it.” The other two spies protested, “We can do it! They may be strong, but our God is stronger!” Sadly, the people as a whole rebelled against the LORD and Moses. The LORD said, “So sad not to trust in me. None of you 20years or older, except Joshua, Caleb, Moses and his brother Aaron, will set foot in that land flowing with milk and honey. You will wander in this desert for 40 years until you all die.”

After 40 years the people once again stood ready to receive their inheritance. At this particular camp, Maribah Kadesh, there was no water. The community gathered and stood opposed to Moses and Aaron. “It would have been better for us to die with our ancestors in the wilderness!” Moses and Aaron asked the LORD what to do… the LORD directed them to stand in front of them all, speak to a rock, and water would flow freely. Instead, Moses, in anger and frustration gathered the assembly together in front of the rock, and said, “**Listen you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock**?” And then he struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and so did the LORD’s judgment on Moses and Aaron. The LORD said to them, “**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**.” (Num 20.12) Eight verses later the Scriptures record the death of Aaron.

Now, in our lesson today, chapter 27, the Israelites are at the doorstep of the Promised Land, and the LORD reminds Moses of his act of unfaithfulness and why he now must pass the torch to Joshua. Doesn’t that seem harsh? For one act of unfaithfulness? You have remember… this was a new generation of Israelites. They had heard but not seen the great acts of the LORD. The LORD wanted to demonstrate to his people that his leaders trusted in his promises and that they could, too. Moses’ trust in God’s command would give glory to the LORD. But Moses and Aaron disobeyed a direct order from their commander-in-chief. They were unfaithful just once, in a very public setting, as leaders of God’s people, and they would now suffer the consequence. Jesus once said, “**To whom much is given, much is expected**.”

Last Sunday, shortly before dawn in small town in Pennsylvania, a work crew installed chain-link fence in front of a football stadium. They then covered the fence with a blue tarp. The work crew then removed the 7-foot, 900-pound bronze statue of a football coach. That coach was the winningest college football coach of all time. He and his wife donated more than $4.5 million to the university to help with the library's construction, and they have paid for scholarships. Now, all of that prestige is gone. The reputation of Penn State will suffer because of one act of unfaithfulness on the part of someone who was supposed to be a leader. None of the good he did do, none of the sanctions imposed upon the college, can cover the act of shamefulness.

But Joe Paterno is not alone. We know all too well the consequences of one act of unfaithfulness on our part, too, don’t we? What happens when you are unfaithful, even just one time… with a computer screen or hard drive that contains inappropriate pictures and videos? You can lose your job. For one act of unfaithfulness that steps beyond the sanctity of a husband and wife, you can lose your marriage. For one act of unfaithfulness as a single person you lose the gift of virginity you were going to give your future spouse on your wedding night. For that one slanderous post on your Facebook page, you lose your gift of a good reputation.

What happens when we continue to be unfaithful? What happens when a pastor of a church continues to be unfaithful with his study of the Word of God? His people are not fed. They are not loved. They are not prayed for. When the leaders in the home continue to despise the Word of God, children and grandchildren no longer see them reading, studying, praying, attending worship, then the next generation will not have the good news of Jesus. We might lose the Word of God for ourselves, and our opportunity to set foot in the Promised Land.

But haven’t we been faithful enough in our lives? Look at Moses. Wasn’t he faithful enough? He led the exodus of 2million people out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. He even stood between an angry God and a disobedient people when they had thrown themselves down before a golden calf. Even with all of his shining moments, none could erase even one act of unfaithfulness. Nor can we. Not even a “seven steps to a more faithful life” book at the Christian book store will help us.

God’s Word tells us, “**If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself**.” (2Timothy 2:13) The LORD shows his faithfulness and his love to Moses in spite of his sin. The LORD leads Moses up to the top of a mountain range that parallels the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. “**See the land I have given them**.” The LORD shows Moses his promise. He also shows his faithfulness by showing Moses his Savior. The LORD told Moses that One would come who would be the perfect leader, the faithful shepherd of God’s people. The LORD told Moses the promised seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head. He would die for Moses’ sins. The LORD told Moses that this One would rise again to give Moses the gift of eternal life. Even though he died on that mountain looking over the beautiful land of Palestine, his soul was gathered to his people by the angels. He may not have stepped into the Promised Land of Israel, he walked into the Promised Land of heaven that day. God had forgiven him through a promise yet to be kept.

The LORD is faithful to us in spite of our unfaithfulness. He shows us one who was the faithful leader, the faithful pastor and shepherd in our place. In our gospel this morning from Mark 6 he shows us that Jesus is that faithful shepherd. Jesus shows faithfulness in the way he leads his disciples, he wants to sit with them and listen to them and to find quiet time to rest their souls through his teaching. But then a mob of people swarms around him. He shows faithfulness as a leader by having compassion on these people. He shows perfect love by patiently teaching them and pointing them to heaven.

What we have failed to do, Jesus took over responsibility, and never shirked his obligation to his Father’s Word. He was faithful in his obedience to his Father. His obedience was very costly - he suffered and died for us. His faithfulness means your forgiveness. His faithfulness means your rescue from death and hell. His faithfulness means you have an allotted acreage in the Promised Land of heaven. Jesus was faithful for you, just as he was for Moses.

The LORD’s faithfulness to Moses led God’s prophet to do something extraordinary. He didn’t complain about his consequence. He didn’t blame the stubbornness of the Israelites who contributed to his anger. Instead, he prayed for the people who gave him nothing but grief… that the LORD would provide a leader for them as they took possession of a 400-year-old promise, the land of Canaan. The LORD showed his faithfulness again. He granted Moses’ prayer. Moses died in peace and confidence knowing that the people he had so patiently shepherded the past 40 years would be in the capable hands of his protégé Joshua. Yes, the LORD would lead his people to the Promised Land. He continues to lead his people to the Promised Land today.

We don’t need a book written by a cute little boy to tell us that heaven is for real. We have the words of him who came down from heaven, lived on earth, went to the grave and came back again, and he promises us, “**I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am**.” (John 14) Yes, Jesus will be faithful to us, and lead us safely to the Promised Land. And even though we sing “I’m but a stranger here… earth is a desert drear… danger and sorrow stand round me on every hand,” we can also sing, “Heaven is my fatherland, heaven is my home.” (Christian Worship 417) As we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, his rod and his staff, they comfort us – those are the promises we find in his Word that he will always be faithful to us and will never forsake us while we sojourn here on earth. Jesus is our faithful leader who promises to strengthen us as we walk to the Promised Land through his Word and through his Lord’s Supper. Jesus is our faithful leader who promises, “**I am with you always, even to the very end of the age**.”

The November in election year brings the possibility that there could be a change of command in the White House. Whatever the outcome, we pray to our heavenly commander-in-chief that he would raise up faithful leaders in our nation, in our communities, our church and in our homes. Leaders will change. But one doesn’t. Today we thank our Father in heaven for providing for us a leader and shepherd who has been faithful for us, and to us, and will lead us home to heaven. Come quickly, Lord Jesus! Amen.