



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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MOSES IS GONE! NOW WHAT?

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~ Scripture: Joshua 1:1-9 ~

INTRODUCTION

Remember the childhood game “*Follow the Leader*”? The idea was to mimic the antics of the person in front of you in the line of boys & girls winding through the neighborhood. Being a follower was alright, but being leader was the most fun—because you got to create imaginative routes and tasks for everyone else to copy.

For 40 years, the Children of Israel journeyed a circuitous route through the desert—but NOT because they were following their leader. It was more due to their faltering faith, their refusal to obey God (to conquer Canaan).

Then a new generation grew up, with JOSHUA as its leader. Joshua had distinguished himself as a man of faith & courage early on; and he was chosen to be Moses’ successor to lead the people of God into the promised land. That would mean many battles to gain possession of the land. . .and a lot of administrative acuity to settle & organize the people in their new domain.

He was a brilliant military commander and a strong spiritual leader. He was confident in God, courageous in the face of opposition, and willing to seek & follow God’s direction.

As Joshua modeled submission to God, the people took note and followed. As a result, Israel remained faithful to God through Joshua’s lifetime. And much was accomplished.

Strong leaders are led by God! That’s the point of our Scripture this morning, which is drawn from the first chapter of the book that bears Joshua’s name. Let’s read the first 9 verses [NLT]:

¹After the death of Moses the LORD’s servant, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ assistant. He said, ²“Moses my servant is dead. Therefore, the time has come for you to lead these people, the Israelites, across the Jordan River into the land I am giving them. ³I promise you what I promised Moses: ‘Wherever you set foot, you will be on land I have given you— ⁴from the Negev wilderness in the south to the Lebanon mountains in the north, from the Euphrates River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west, including all the land of the Hittites.’ ⁵No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. For I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail you or abandon you.

⁶“Be strong and courageous, for you are the one who will lead these people to possess all the land I swore to their ancestors I would give them. ⁷Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the instructions Moses gave you. Do not deviate from them, turning either to the right or to the left. Then you will be successful in everything you do. ⁸Study this Book of the Law continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do. ⁹This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

We can all recollect great men & women of faith who have crossed our paths and had great impact on our lives—e.g.: mentors, teachers, pastors, prayer warriors, encouragers. They have been there for us. . .prayed for us. . .counseled us. . .shared their wisdom. . .relieved our guilt and fear. . .and modeled Christ’s love and grace. People full of integrity who have shown us the way.

But, for whatever reason, they’re gone now. Some have finished the race and won the crown of life. Some have moved away or moved on. But we’re still here. So:

- Who will encourage us? teach us? lead us today?
- A more important question is, when will we pick up the ball?
When will we become the leaders, the teachers, the encouragers?

You see, whether it’s the family, a business, or the church, there comes a time when *we who were led* must step up to the plate and *become the leaders*. I’ve heard it said that the church is never more than a generation away from extinction. “*God has no grandchildren, only children.*” Every one of us in our own generation must make our way with God; we cannot ride the coattails of our forefathers (or mothers).

That’s why JOSHUA is an important figure for us.

MOSES is dead now. That great man who led the Children of Israel out of Egypt and most of the way to the Promised Land of Canaan. He had a walk and a closeness with God that few could match. He had an air about him that commanded (notice I didn’t say “demanded”) respect. He was the leader, the one who set the pace, the one who kept everybody on track, the one who wouldn’t give up when the people were hemmed in by the Red Sea on one side and the Egyptians in hot pursuit on the other.

But Moses is dead (it says in v. 2). He is gone. Now what? Who will take his place? Who will take us out of this God-forsaken wilderness and into the “land of milk & honey”?

God always has His people. He always raises up those who will take over. . .who will continue or bring to completion what He has started. We heard it the other night at the Charge Conference, didn’t we? There were some **Moses’s** who got this church started 175 years ago. If it were not for their faithfulness (and the faithfulness of many who followed them), we wouldn’t be here today. And if we are faithful, 175 years from now (should Christ tarry), there will be something even greater. Today we are the **Joshuas** to keep it going in the direction God wants it to go.

God wants to raise up all kinds of leadership in this congregation:

- Not GURUs who wield great power or authority
- Not SUPER-STARs who are super-talented and super-gifted, and can “wow” a crowd
[God generally fulfills His plans through ordinary folks leading ordinary lives]
- Not people who hold influential positions
[A leader may never hold an “office” in the church]
- But faithful people who will be exemplary in their lifestyle, and draw people to Christ.

Some will be task-oriented. . .some will have no specifically assigned task. [There are many “teachers” in our church who teach us by virtue of who they are, not a class they convene.]

Some will hold positions (either elected or appointed). . .others will hold no such positions.

Some will have many under their care. . .others will have only one under their care.

- In our church, we have Sunday school & Bible study leaders, small group facilitators, ministry cell leaders, many project managers or team leaders, children & youth workers, administrative directors;
- But we also have people who are in a mentoring, discipling, caring relationship one-on-one.

Leadership is more a function of WHO you are than WHAT position you hold.

A leader is one who “influences”. . .one who “guides in direction, course, action, opinion”.

Whether in business, in the family, or in the church. . .

1. Leaders are driven forward by vision

They have seen the burning bush. . .They have heard God's voice. . .They have a clear picture in their minds of what God wants them to accomplish. . .They have clarity of purpose. Moses saw the "promised land" even though Egypt (i.e.: slavery) was all the people had ever known.

2. Leaders live & walk by faith, not by sight

It is "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). God will go before us. . .help us overcome obstacles. . .accomplish the seemingly impossible. But God will not bless what we attempt to do through our own strength, ability, or resources.

Example: Our Stewardship Cell is very careful in setting our budget so we don't end up in red ink. But they don't just base it on what they think we can do, rather on the ministry God has called us to do (knowing that if God calls us to do a certain thing, He will supply the means). So. . .

3. Leaders are willing to take risks. . .and even risk failure

4. Leaders are willing to make some much-needed changes

They bring change (the unexpected); they don't manage the status quo (what's expected). That's always risky. . .and it's often resisted. So they may not be on everybody's most-liked list. They are willing to make decisions others don't want to make, and so often stand alone. If need be, they will say "NO" when they'd like to say "YES". They will go against public and popular opinion in order to do the right thing.

5. Leaders are willing to pay the price

Because they have found something not only worth *living* for. . .but worth *dying* for. They are fully invested—and their resources and their energy are fully devoted to the passion God has laid on their heart.

Someone once asked Martin Luther King if he was concerned that he might not live long. His reply was: *"Sure, I would love to live a long life. Longevity is much to be desired. But I must accomplish the will of God for my life."*

Have you found anything in life that grips you and fulfills you like that? Have you found a passion that is worthy of your time + your energy. . .that makes you willing to pay the price of hard work (and perhaps a bit of unpopularity)?

6. Leaders are persons of integrity

They strive to live above reproach. You know, it is easier to preach a sermon than to live one! But leaders in the Kingdom of God are living examples of walking with God, not just talking about Him

THE LOCAL CHURCH

All of that comes together in the local church. **It is my conviction that local churches (like ours) are the hope of the world.**

That's not to downplay the work that many fine organizations perform (e.g.: charitable agencies, the Red Cross, humanitarian groups and corporations that work tirelessly to improve the quality of life for us all).

But it is the local church that is uniquely equipped to offer healing to deeply wounded souls. We have an utterly unique mission to fulfill on planet Earth—and that is to transform this world and usher people into the next.

We can win the war on terror. . .negotiate peace in Israel. . .eliminate (or at least reduce) poverty and drug abuse. . .improve the economic conditions so that jobs are created and fewer people are unemployed. But

who will tend to the TRANSFORMATION OF THE HUMAN HEART? That's our job. That's why God has us here.

The most powerful people in government and industry can re-arrange the yard markers on the playing field of life through legislation. But they cannot change a human heart. Businessmen can provide sorely needed jobs. Wise educators can instill useful knowledge and skills. Self-help programs can offer effective methods of modifying behavior. But: *"It is the power of the love of JC, the love that conquers sin and wipes out shame and heals wounds and reconciles enemies and patches broken dreams and ultimately changes the world, one life at a time."* So says Bill Hybels in his book *Courageous Leadership*.

We've had a lot of illnesses, deaths, and mind-boggling hardships visited upon us lately. Some of you are going through unbearable trials right now. And you would be crushed beneath the load were it not for the family of God (which mediates the power of God to you in your situation).

ILLUS.> Two weeks ago, there was a little girl born to a couple by the name of **Jeff & Stacy**. Jeff is the cousin of **Doug Smith** and grandson of **Myrtle Smith**. It was their first child. They thought they would be going home to a house that had been decorated for a newborn. Instead they ended up in the PICU, because little Gianna had heart abnormalities. I visited them there, and have never seen so many machines and doctors & nurses working so feverishly to save such a tiny young life. Not even the vast resources of the U-M Medical Center were able to save this little girl. And now we have two devastated parents—lost in their grief. . .lost spiritually, too, because they do not have personal faith at this point. But I stood back and watched as Doug & Kimberly and Myrtle have shepherded their loved ones through this heartbreaking tragedy. . .AND have been shepherded by many of you. That's the LOCAL CHURCH at work! That's LEADERSHIP!

I could enumerate stories all day long. This one is only partially written; we don't know where it will all lead. Where would this family go. . .how would they handle this heartbreak without the church (even though they aren't even attending a church. . .yet!)?

I'm telling you this morning, the transforming power of God is invested right here in this setting. It's not the location. . .it's not the denomination. . .it's not the preaching or the music (that lasts only a few minutes each week). It's the power of the H.S. working through people who are willing to give God room to work in their lives. . .AND. . .through leaders who see & understand their gift of leadership. . .don't shrink back from it. . .and allow God to use them to move His people + His work forward.

Lots of studies have been done on what makes churches healthy (so they can grow and flourish). They all agree that healthy churches are led by people who possess and deploy the spiritual gift of LEADERSHIP. We can't all be followers. We can't all be bench-sitters. We shouldn't always lean on the dependable few to make it all work. God has gifted each local congregation—including ours—with leaders to come up with the strategies and structures to get the job done.

The problem is, some of us haven't acknowledged that gift and capacity yet. But **Romans 12:8** tells those who do have the gift of leadership to sit up and take notice, to *"lead with diligence"*. Otherwise, we can never reach our full redemptive potential.

What do I mean by "people gifted to lead"? I mean people who are:

1. Driven forward by vision
2. Live and walk by faith, not by sight
3. Willing to take some risks and make some much-needed changes
4. Pay the price
5. Persons of integrity
6. Who fire up other Christ-followers to give their absolute best to God
so that the Gospel is preached
the lost are found

the believers are equipped
the poor are served
the lonely are enfolded into community
AND GOD GETS THE CREDIT FOR IT ALL!!!

We live in a world dominated by evil—where terrorists threaten to take over whole countries, where murders and thefts fill the front pages of our newspapers, where the innocent suffer. What (or Whom) else is the hope of the world if not Christ and the church?

The question is: Will the men & women who have been entrusted with leadership gifts—and I'm not talking about "pastors"; but I am talking to a room full of people, many of whom have extraordinary giftedness and potential. . .maybe even a "calling": Will you take this "gift" seriously. . .develop it fully. . .and deploy it courageously (as JOSHUA did)—so that willing and gifted believers in our church can work together to make a difference in the world???

And will all of us exercise our capacity to lead—in our homes, families, businesses, workplaces, school, community, neighborhood—wherever God has planted you. You don't have to hold a position in an organization to wield influence or guide a course of action (which is what leadership is). You can make a difference in your world by exercising moral leadership (e.g.: by being honest and truthful). . .by being the spiritual leader in the home (MEN!). . .by being a godly leader where you do hold a position. . .by saying "NO" when that is the right thing to do (KIDS!). Why not YOU be the one to exercise the peer pressure for a change?!

CONCLUSION

Quote from the book I mentioned earlier (Hybels, p. 23):

"There is nothing like the local church when it's working right. Its beauty is indescribable. Its power is breathtaking. Its potential is unlimited. It comforts the grieving and heals the broken in the context of community. It builds bridges to seekers and offers truth to the confused. It provides resources for those in need and opens its arms to the forgotten, the downtrodden, the disillusioned. It breaks the chains of addictions, frees the oppressed, and offers belonging to the marginalized of this world. Whatever the capacity for human suffering (and I might add "evil"), the church has a greater capacity for healing and wholeness."

Yes, MOSES is gone. What next? You JOSHUA's out here:

- May you, through the power of the H.S., become all God intended you to be;
- And may we as a local cong. be all that God wants us to be.