

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, 'My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.'

Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, 'Pass through the camp, and command the people: "Prepare your provisions; for in three days you are to cross over the Jordan, to go in to take possession of the land that the LORD your God gives you to possess."'

- Joshua 1:1-11

One day I was having a conversation over lunch with one of my mentors, John Butcher; he and I were talking about our influences in the ministry. He said: "You know, Jonas – there are more people at this table right now than you and me! You and I bring a whole community of people who have had influence on us – people who have helped shape who we are!"

It is true for each one of us here this morning. Each one you bring with you those who have touched your life, those who have encouraged you, those who have taught you how to think... how to live.

Today is All Saints' Day Sunday. It is one of my favorite days in our liturgical year. On All Saints' Day, we embrace those who have gone before us – those who have committed their lives to pursue love and justice... and those who committed their lives to the church. Perhaps some of those who have had influence on our lives would hesitate to think of themselves as saints! I know many of my greatest mentors and teachers would resist thinking of themselves as a saint.

In the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark & Luke), we discover that Jesus does not refer to himself as "Lord" or "Messiah." I think Jesus was far too humble a person to refer to himself in such a manner. Instead he asks: "Who do *you* say that I am?"

Jesus models to us humility... he models to us saintly behavior in part, I believe, in resisting to brag about his credentials... or by resisting to be called by a *certain* title.

Who do you bring into this Sanctuary with you today? Who are those (saints) who have forever left a mark on you... on your being... on your character... Who are the people who were a part of your life in the past, or the people in your life now, that you give thanks to God for?

One of the most important practices of the Christian faith is: gratitude, giving thanks... giving thanks to God... and giving thanks to others. Each of us must be aware of the people that we bring into a room... and give thanks to God *for them*... and also *for their legacy* that they have shared with us.

The reality of death can make this spiritual practice difficult. Perhaps there is someone in your life who has left a profound mark on you and their life was cut short...

“When we see so many people die at a young age, through wars, starvation, street violence, and physical and emotional neglect, we often wonder what the value of their short lives is. It seems that their journeys have been cut off before they could reach any of their goals, realize any of their dreams, or accomplish any of their tasks. But, short as their lives may have been, I believe that they belong to that immense communion of saints, from all times and all places...” (Reflection from Henri J.N. Nouwen’s *Bread for the Journey*, November 9 journal entry)

A child who dies in this life grows to full maturity in heaven... his or her greatest dreams will be fulfilled... all relationships will be restored. “God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

Perhaps we know a person who lived a long, full life... and still somehow letting that person go was one of the hardest things you ever had to do.

At the death of his mother, Henri Nouwen writes: “For a while, we kept living as if she were only gone for a time and could return at any moment. We even kept doing things as if we were preparing for the moment when she would appear again on our doorsteps. But as the days passed, our hearts came to know that she was gone, never to return. And it was then that real grief began to invade us.” (*A Letter of Consolation*, p. 44)

“God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” Their dreams have been fulfilled... their relationships are restored... they are with God.

When someone dies who is close to us, we wonder if we can go on. We pull ourselves out of bed and we wonder: “How can I take on this day? Let alone the coming week? Or year?!”

My mentor and chaplain supervisor in San Francisco taught me something about grief. He said: “The most profound losses in your life will never go away – completely. They will always be part of you. There may be experiences in your life that may trigger your grief, as you remember your loss. And yet, with time passing... and healing... your relationship to your grief changes... you gain understanding... and it becomes less and less painful.”

Another wise friend offered a kind word of caution. He said: “You cannot take your pain... and put it in a box... and pretend that it will go away magically on its own. If you do that, sooner or later your spirit will be filled with boxes of grief... and you’ll have little room to move around... to live... and breathe...”

We must grieve our losses! Jesus encourages us to do so. In Matthew 16, he says: “Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how.” (v. 25, *The Message*)

This is easier said than done...

In our text this morning, we see how Joshua is grieving. Moses has died. He wonders how he will move on... he wonders how the people will be able to move on...

God offers words of comfort: “Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I promised to Moses.”

God will not let Joshua stay stuck in his grief, but God keeps him moving forward. God says: “Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites.”

Joshua idolized his mentor Moses. He wonders how he will go on without him.

God says: “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.” Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them.”

Toward the end of the text, God makes a command... not a statement, but command. God says: "Be strong and courageous; *do not be frightened or dismayed...*" That phrase is repeated more than any other in scripture... "Do not be frightened... do not be afraid!" Do you think God knows that we are a fearful... an anxious people? I think this phrase is repeated several times in scripture... because God knows that we are afraid and anxious... and God does not want us *to act* out of fear or anxiety.

We need not be afraid, God says, because "God is with us wherever we go." (Joshua 1:9)

And so we move on... we go about living our lives... doing the work that God has called us to do... and we bring with us our ancestors... those who have gone before us... the communion of saints...

There are more people in this room than just you and me...

Who do you bring with you this morning?

We bring with us people like Moses, Joshua, Esther & Martha. We bring with us Jesus of Nazareth, Mary Magdalene, and St. Paul.

I bring with me Leslie White, Bob Schnucker, Father Poyser, Bogle Smith, Alice Loftin, John Butcher, Vivienne Johnstone, Nan Swanson, Robert Dykstra, Clifford and Pamela Hayes.

We join together with them... and with the people who you bring with you this day. We share in the Lord's Supper with them, which we are about to share.

And we go from the table... and on to the land that God gives us to possess.

*I pray all this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*