

Sermon #1,018: Joshua 13:1-8, 21:43-45

4-14-13 (Easter 2: Good Shepherd Sunday), Bethany-Princeton MN

OUR GOOD SHEPHERD GIVES US REST FROM ALL OUR ENEMIES

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Good Shepherd of the sheep, who came to seek the lost and gather them into Your fold: Have compassion on those who have wandered from You; feed those who hunger, cause the weary to lie down in Your pastures, bind up those who are broken in heart, and strengthen those who are weak. Lead us all in the paths of righteousness, for Your name's sake. Amen. (*Parish Prayers*)

In the name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd who fights for us, fellow redeemed:

Once upon a time Joshua had been a shepherd. The Israelites were shepherds while they lived in Egypt. It was Joseph's plan 400 years before Joshua was born, that by tending sheep in Egypt they would be left alone to live as a people.

Joshua was in his early 40s at the time of the Exodus, barely half Moses' age. He was considered a young man then, energetic and strong, quiet but possessing obvious leadership skills. He was the general of Moses' army. He went up Mount Sinai with Moses. He was one of the 12 who spied out the land of Canaan. Joshua endured the Israelites' rejection of the good report he and Caleb gave. He saw all his peers, except Caleb, die in the wilderness. After 38 more years of wandering, Joshua succeeded Moses as the divinely chosen leader to lead God's people into Canaan. As he stands before the people of Israel in the Promised Land, after 7 years of constant warfare, 47 years all told from the day they followed Moses out of Egypt -- he's now a good 90 years old -- his days as a shepherd, working with bleating sheep, seem like ancient history.

But he is a shepherd. He was leading and guiding the children of Israel, who in the psalms are called a flock, into the Promised Land. They were following him, following where he led. They looked forward to Canaan as a "*land flowing with milk and honey,*" like flocks of weary sheep and lambs look forward to green pasture and still waters. But as Jesus spoke in the gospel about

wolves coming after sheep so that a shepherd's work includes fighting, Joshua's shepherding of Israel included having to fight battles. In all these ways Joshua was "shepherding," and was a picture of the true Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

Just as Joshua, not Moses, was the one who actually brought the multitude of Israel into their Promised Land, Jesus brings a multitude whom no one can count into the true Promised Land, heaven. Moses the Lawgiver, who died just outside Canaan, represents the Law's inability to bring you into heaven. The Law can tell you what to do but can't help you do it; it'll only condemn you. Joshua, whose name (like Jesus') means "*He Will Save*," represents the Gospel of salvation, which removes the guilt of your sins for the sake of Jesus, the greater Joshua, so that you go into heaven without sins, unburdened by the Law, victorious.

This comparison between Joshua and Jesus comes from the one verse in the New Testament that mentions Joshua. There it says something amazing about him, for us who read this history that reports, inarguably, that Joshua was the one who brought them into the land of promise. Hebrews 4:8 says: "*For if Joshua had given them rest, then God would not afterward have spoken of another day*" to enter His rest. In that verse it says that for all Joshua did, he did not give the Israelites "rest," the word God uses for life in the Promised Land.

This is first of all because Canaan is not the true Promised Land. The land was not an end in itself. Moses powerfully preached this truth, recorded in Deuteronomy, that if they turned away from God then God would take them out of the land. Joshua is known less for his preaching than his battles, but this faithful shepherd preached the same message: "*When you have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you*" (Jsh 23:16).

Those who see the ownership of the land by the current, reconstituted nation of Israel as something the Bible teaches are mistaken. There are other reasons to support this: out of a concern for justice, guided by mercy, or even by what is best for our nation. But the Bible does not teach this, doesn't even teach in the Old Testament that they were to have an everlasting right to this land, regardless of their actions. Canaan was to be a picture of the true Promised Land, giving them the desire for heaven, the land where there are no enemies, no foreign gods, nothing to distract or divert us from serving God.

So obviously this has something to do with us. It's not just about those Israelites. The story of their taking possession of the land is intended to teach us. What we learn today is found in one powerful word, the word of which this world is not worthy, the great little word "*rest*." It is more than a word; when it is spoken or when you read it, it creates a sensation or feeling of relief. Because *rest* is more than what you think. In the Old Testament it is the meaning of the word "*Sabbath*." It is what God did on the seventh day, when all was "*very good*." This word *rest* is the reason the Sabbath is not just a day, or about keeping laws; it is about Jesus. He is the rest. He said, "*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ... rest for your souls*." That phrase, "*give you rest*," Jesus didn't just pluck it out of the air. It comes from Joshua 21 here, where it says: "**The LORD gave to Israel all of the land ... The LORD gave them rest all around ... The LORD delivered [gave] into their hand all their enemies.**"

This is a singularly great passage, Joshua 21:43-45. You hear the holy name of the Lord three times, just like in the benediction recorded in the book of Numbers, which we hear at the end of every church service: "The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace." This is the Gospel. When

you hear from the Old Testament, "*the LORD, the LORD, the LORD,*" you're hearing a naming of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You're hearing the Gospel, because here in Joshua 21 it not only says His name, but also the verb "gave" goes with it all three times: The Lord gave, the Lord gave, the Lord gave. They are three "gaves," but it is all one.

This means something for you! It is the very nature of the true God to give, to save by the way of gift: grace. It extends even to your bodily needs, that He gives *everything* by grace; what do you have that you did not receive as a gift? It says here that "**the LORD, the LORD, the LORD,**" the thrice-holy God, the Triune God, is the Shepherd. "*The LORD is my shepherd.*" Notice the second phrase, which corresponds to the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ; of Him it says even here in Joshua, "**The LORD gave them rest all around,**" on every side.

This is the essence of Christ the Good Shepherd, your Good Shepherd: to give you rest. But we are not very good at rest, are we? We are by nature restless. This is part of the essence of sin. This is where sin comes from, where it starts: not to be content with God's gifts, to think you never have enough, to be looking for something better, comparing what you have with what someone else has, or comparing what God has given you with what He hasn't. This is when you stray onto other paths that the Good Shepherd does not want you to follow. You get distracted. You're not looking at Him. You're looking around. You look around in fear and worry for what disaster might strike you next. You look around in hunger for something that will satisfy your curiosity or to feed your sinful appetites, but it only whets your appetite for more. Like the Israelites who came into Canaan, you are confronted by these enemies all around you, but in your case they are the enemies of faith: sin, death, and the devil. You get tired of fighting them. You get tired of the struggle. You might even blame the Shepherd for lead-

ing you this way. It doesn't seem like you are lying down by still waters. He could lead you on an easier path, couldn't He? Why doesn't He do that?

This part of the Joshua story reflects this truth. Joshua divides up the land of Canaan among the 12 tribes before they have won all the battles. When it says, **"The LORD gave to Israel all of the land,"** the fighting is not over. Joshua divides up the land at God's command as if it is theirs – which God says it is – but they still have to drive out the rest of the nations that are there.

So, what kind of "rest" is this? This is the rest that you have *by faith* in the promise. God keeps all His promises. All Israel had to do was take possession of what He Himself was putting into their hands. There was no battle that they would not win. But some of them refused to fight those battles, and it became their downfall eventually. This, again, is something that teaches us.

You know where your Good Shepherd is leading you. He's leading you to heaven. The Promised Land. Where there will be rest on every side. No enemies. No false gods. No being distracted or diverted. But do you only come into that rest at the moment of death? No. He gives it to you now. That rest from your enemies, where no matter where you look you will see no enemies, no sin, no devil, no death, is the Gospel. It is your sins being totally removed. You have it by faith.

Faith in Him is completely and totally a gift from Him. He is the Joshua who has won your battles for you. He is risen! But He doesn't do the believing for you. You do the believing, even if it's only a gift from Him, by the power of the Holy Spirit through His Word and Sacraments. God doesn't take the impediments to faith out of your way completely. They will still be there, like those Canaanite tribes whose names are relatively unknown and unfamiliar to us now. It will still be a struggle to believe, to resist the ways of the world. He, your Shepherd, is leading you through this. He, your Shepherd, is calling you to *faith*

in His Word, to trust that even while you are in this world He has given you peace on every side, the peace that comes from sins forgiven, the peace that comes from trusting that the devil is a vanquished foe, the peace that comes from the belief that the inheritance is yours even if you don't see it yet. Like Joshua, not a word of His fails of any good thing which He has promised you. Come to where Jesus meets you; He will give you rest. He is the rest for your soul. Amen!