

Lectionary Readings: Joshua 3: 7-17
Psalms 125 and 126
Matthew 10: 1-22

This week we move on from Exodus and the leadership of Moses to that of his successor, Joshua. Moses had clearly seen leadership qualities in the young Hoshea (son of Nun); and made him his assistant. Last week we noted how he was with Moses as they came down off Mount Sinai after Moses had spent forty days and nights on the mountain.

It was Moses who gave the name of Joshua to Hoshea, recorded in Numbers 13 at the time Moses selected one man from each of the tribes to explore Canaan:

¹ The LORD said to Moses, ² 'Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders.'

³ So at the LORD's command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites. ⁴ These are their names:

from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua son of Zakkur;

⁵ from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat son of Hori;

⁶ from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh;

⁷ from the tribe of Issachar, Igal son of Joseph;

⁸ **from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea son of Nun;**

⁹ from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti son of Raphu;

¹⁰ from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel son of Sodi;

¹¹ from the tribe of Manasseh (a tribe of Joseph), Gaddi son of Susi;

¹² from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel son of Gemalli;

¹³ from the tribe of Asher, Sethur son of Michael;

¹⁴ from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi son of Vophsi;

¹⁵ from the tribe of Gad, Geuel son of Maki.

¹⁶ These are the names of the men Moses sent to explore the land.

(Moses gave Hoshea son of Nun the name Joshua.)

We are told that Hoshea means "*salvation*" but Joshua means "*The Lord saves*".

Further to this we gather that the Greek form of Joshua is "*Jesus*".

On their return, ten gave a bad report about the land; only Caleb and Joshua expressed a contrary view, as an NIV Study Bible footnote comments – "prompted by faith in God". Numbers 14 tells how the Israelite people reacted to the report brought back by the twelve 'spies':

The people rebel

¹ That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud.

² All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, 'If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness!

³ Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?'

⁴ And they said to each other, 'We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.'

⁵ Then Moses and Aaron fell face down in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there.

⁶ **Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes ⁷ and said to the entire Israelite assembly, 'The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. ⁸ If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us.**

⁹ **Only do not rebel against the LORD.**

And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.'

¹⁰ But the whole assembly talked about stoning them.

Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites.

We will read more of Caleb in two weeks time.

The Lord expresses His anger to Moses and tells of His planned action: (Numbers 14)

¹¹ The LORD said to Moses, 'How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them?

¹² I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they.'

Once again Moses successfully pleads with the Lord that He forgives the people: (Numbers 14)

²⁰ The LORD replied, 'I have forgiven them, as you asked.

²¹ Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, ²² not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times – ²³ not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors.

No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.

²⁴ But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.

²⁵ Since the Amalekites and the Canaanites are living in the valleys, turn back tomorrow and set out towards the desert along the route to the Red Sea (*or Sea of Reeds*).

Thus begins the long, long wandering in the desert before the Israelites finally enter the Promised Land. In Numbers 20 we read of another, significant, occasion when there is no water for the people who as usual quarrel with Moses and Aaron:

⁶ Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the tent of meeting and fell face down, and the glory of the LORD appeared to them.

⁷ The LORD said to Moses, ⁸ 'Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together.

Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water.

You will bring water out of the rock for the community so that they and their livestock can drink.'

⁹ So Moses took the staff from the LORD's presence, just as he commanded him.

¹⁰ He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, 'Listen, you rebels, must **we bring you water out of this rock?**'

¹¹ **Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff.**

Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.

¹² **But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.'**

¹³ These were the waters of Meribah, (*quarrelling*) where the Israelites quarrelled with the LORD and where he was proved holy among them.

The NIV Study Bible comments on verse 12:

"you will not bring this community into the land." The end result of Moses' action is sure: neither Aaron nor Moses would enter the land of promise. Of their contemporaries only Joshua and Caleb would survive to enter the land. The inclusion of Aaron demonstrates his partnership with his brother in the breach against God's holiness.

I wonder how different subsequent history would have been if Moses had simply spoken to the rock as instructed by the Lord!

The account of the 'spies' being sent out as recorded in Deuteronomy and the reaction of the people is similar to that in Numbers: (Deuteronomy 1)

²² Then all of you came to me and said, 'Let us send men ahead to spy out the land for us and bring back a report about the route we are to take and the towns we will come to.'

²³ The idea seemed good to me; so I selected twelve of you, one man from each tribe.

²⁴ They left and went up into the hill country, and came to the Valley of Eshkol and explored it.

²⁵ **Taking with them some of the fruit of the land, they brought it down to us and reported, 'It is a good land that the LORD our God is giving us.'**

²⁶ But you were unwilling to go up; you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God.

²⁷ You grumbled in your tents and said, 'The LORD hates us; so he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us.

²⁸ Where can we go? Our brothers have made our hearts melt in fear. They say, "The people are stronger and taller than we are; the cities are large, with walls up to the sky. We even saw the Anakites there."

The passage goes on:

⁴ When the LORD heard what you said, he was angry and solemnly swore:

³⁵ 'No one from this evil generation shall see the good land I swore to give your ancestors, ³⁶ **except Caleb son of Jephunneh. He will see it, and I will give him and his descendants the land he set his feet on, because he followed the LORD wholeheartedly.'**

³⁷ **Because of you the LORD became angry with me also and said, 'You shall not enter it, either.'**

³⁸ **But your assistant, Joshua son of Nun, will enter it. Encourage him, because he will lead Israel to inherit it.**

Joshua is now leading the people of Israel: (Joshua 1)

Joshua installed as leader

¹ After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant:

² 'Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the River Jordan 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 Mediterranean Sea in the west.

⁵ No one will 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 never leave you nor forsake you.

⁶ Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors 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 Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; 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 afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.'

We come, eventually, to today's reading – the moment when the people of Israel finally cross the River Jordan and enter the Promised Land. This account is another example of the Lord – in the presence of The Ark – dividing the waters in order for the people to pass over on dry land.

In Joshua 3: 1-6 we read of the preparations for this momentous event – our reading commencing at verse 7:

Crossing the Jordan

- ¹ Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over.
- ² After three days the officers went throughout the camp, ³ giving orders to the people: 'When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it.
- ⁴ Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about two thousand cubits (*about 900 metres*) between you and the ark; do not go near it.'
- ⁵ **Joshua told the people, 'Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.'**
- ⁶ Joshua said to the priests, 'Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people.' So they took it up and went ahead of them.

The reading gives a simple account of the events of that day. We may be mystified by verse 12 – why was Joshua instructed to choose one man from each of the tribes of Israel; they appear to play no part in the events of the day. We find the answer at the beginning of chapter 4:

- ¹ When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, ² 'Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, ³ and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.'
- ⁴ **So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe,** ⁵ and said to them, 'Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, ⁶ to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, "What do these stones mean?" ⁷ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel for ever.'
- ⁸ So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the LORD had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down.
- ⁹ Joshua set up the twelve stones (*or Joshua also set up twelve stones*) that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant had stood. And they are there to this day.

There would appear to be a time difference between verses 1-2 and 4-5! In the first two verses the whole nation has crossed the river; the twelve men are instructed to collect stones from the middle of the river where the NIV translation, above, says the priests **are standing**; the NIV translation in the Study Bible has the past tense – "where the priests **stood**."

In verse 4 we find Joshua speaking to the twelve chosen men and instructing them to "go over before the Ark of the Lord". Did that mean they were to be first into the river or does the word "before" have the same meaning as 'appear before'?

The Study Bible tells us that an alternative translation suggests that Joshua set up a second pile of stones – in the middle of the river.

The Israelites cross the Jordan opposite Jericho. 'Spies' have already been sent into the city and sheltered by Rahab. Next week we read of the Fall of Jericho.

Psalms 125 and 126 – two more of the "Songs of Ascent". The NIV Study Bible says of psalm 125:

Israel's peace: in testimony, prayer and benediction. The psalm is probably post-exilic and was probably spoken in the temple liturgy by a Levite.

and of Psalm 126:

A song of joy for restoration to Zion. If not composed for those who returned from Babylonian exile (see Ezra and Nehemiah) – the place of exile is not named – it surely served to voice the joy of that restored community. The psalm divides into two stanzas of four (Hebrew) lines each, with their initial lines sharing a common theme. Thematic unity is further served by repetition (cf vv.2-3) and other key words ("the Lord", "songs of joy", "carrying"). References to God's action (vv.1,3) frame the first stanza, while v.2 offers exposition.

Graham Kendrick has expressed the opening words of Psalm 126 in one of his ‘songs’:

When the Lord brought us back and restored our freedom,
we felt so good, we felt so strong, at first we thought we were dreaming.
How we laughed! How we sang, we were overflowing;
then we heard the nations say, ‘Look what the Lord has done.’
The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.
The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy, with joy, with joy, with joy.

A number of writers have included or been inspired by verses 5 and/or 6 of this psalm in their compositions:

⁵ Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.

⁶ Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow,
will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.

Johannes Brahms quotes Matthew 5:4 and Psalm 126:5-6 in the opening chorus of his (German) Requiem.

In producing his English text for a Novello edition of this work, Ivor Atkins wrote (in September, 1944):

Brahms drew the words of his ‘German Requiem’ entirely from the Holy Scriptures. The English adaption I have based for the most part, upon the Authorised and Revised versions of the Holy Bible, in some cases making a conflation of both texts. Here and there, where difficulties presented themselves, I have been glad to avail myself of sixteenth-century translations – as for instance, those contained in the Douay Bible and the Book of Common Prayer – where they offered texts which enabled me to reproduce the rhythm of the German words more closely.

Selig sind, die da Leid tragen, denn sie sollen getröstet werden.

Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted. (Matthew 5:4)

Die mit Tränen säen, werden mit Freuden ernten.

Sie gehen hin und weinen und tragen edlen Samen, und kommen mit Freuden und bringen ihre Garben.

They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.

Who goeth forth and weepeth, and beareth precious seed, shall come again rejoicing, and bring his sheaves with him. (Psalm 126: 5-6)

The Scripture Index of ‘Songs of Fellowship – volume 6’ links a song written by Darlene Zschech and Israel Houghton with Psalm 125:1:

¹ Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures for ever.

God is fighting for us
God is on our side;
He has overcome,
Yes, He has overcome.
We will not be shaken,
We will not be moved,
Jesus You are here.

Carrying our burdens,
Covering our shame;
He has overcome.
We will not be shaken,
We will not be moved,
Jesus You are here.

*I will live,
I will not die;
The resurrection power of Christ,
Alive in me, and I am free
In Jesus’ Name.*

*I will live I will not die
I will declare and lift You high
Christ revealed
And I am healed
In Jesus’ Name*

God is fighting for us,
Pushing back the darkness,
Lighting up the Kingdom
That cannot be shaken.
In the name of Jesus,
Enemy’s defeated,
And we will shout it out,
Shout it out.

Finally we read the two psalms again – this time in the words of ‘The Message’:

Psalm 125

¹⁻⁵ Those who trust in GOD are like Zion Mountain:
Nothing can move it, a rock-solid mountain
you can always depend on.
Mountains encircle Jerusalem,
and GOD encircles his people—always has and always will.
The fist of the wicked will never violate
What is due the righteous, provoking wrongful violence.
Be good to your good people, GOD,
to those whose hearts are right!
GOD will round up the backsliders,
corral them with the incorrigibles.

Peace over Israel!

Psalm 126

¹⁻³ It seemed like a dream, too good to be true,
when GOD returned Zion’s exiles.
We laughed, we sang, we couldn’t believe our good fortune.
We were the talk of the nations—“GOD was wonderful to them!”
GOD was wonderful to us; we are one happy people.

⁴⁻⁶ And now, GOD, do it again—bring rains to our drought-stricken lives
So those who planted their crops in despair
will shout “Yes!” at the harvest,
So those who went off with heavy hearts
will come home laughing, with armloads of blessing.

In our New Testament reading from Matthew Jesus sends out his twelve disciples – He sends them with His authority to ‘drive out impure spirits’ and to heal.

Do we, I wonder, see ourselves as going out with the authority of Jesus?

In verses 5 and 6 we read words that we do not associate with the Christian message today:

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans.

⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.

These words might, at first sight, appear to be ‘racist’ but we should remember that time after time Jesus tried to keep His earthly ministry ‘low key’ – His time had not yet come.

It wasn’t until after His death and resurrection that the full scope of salvation was revealed: (Matthew 28)

The great commission

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’

Returning to our reading, Jesus tells the disciples the message they are to proclaim. At the end of verse 8 we read well known words that we should constantly bear in mind:

Freely you have received; freely give.

These words are taken up in the chorus of Carol Owens hymn – ‘God forgave my sin in Jesus’ name’:

*He said:
‘Freely, freely you have received,
freely, freely give;
go in my name and because you believe,
others will know that I live.’*

Is this our experience? Are we prepared to go out to bring in ‘others’ - for them to know Jesus?

This is perhaps a very relevant question, as post-pandemic we are considering the future shape of our churches and mission.

There are two further passages from this reading that stand out to me:

¹⁶ ‘I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

¹⁷ Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues.

¹⁸ **On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles.**

¹⁹ **But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, ²⁰ for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.**

How much do we rely on our own wisdom, our own words in any situation – rather than putting our trust in the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us, even to speak through us?

Jesus finally gives a warning and a promise:

²¹ ‘Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.

²² **You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.**

The warning – there may be division and opposition from those who are, in human terms, very close to us.

The promise is to those who persevere in the faith, as Matthew again says in chapter 24: (Authorised Version)

¹³ **But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.**

¹⁴ **And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.**

We have a gospel to proclaim,
good news for all throughout the earth;
the gospel of a Saviour’s name:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

Tell of his birth at Bethlehem -
not in a royal house or hall,
but in a stable dark and dim,
the Word made flesh, a light for all.

Tell of his death at Calvary:
hated by those he came to save,
in lonely suffering on the cross,
for all he loved his life he gave.

Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
empty the tomb, for he was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
that we might share his victory.

Tell of his reign at God’s right hand,
by all creation glorified.
He sends his Spirit on his Church
to live for him, the Lamb who died.

Now we rejoice to name him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel-message we proclaim:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.