

Septuagesima (2026)

Back in 1994, following a Sunday morning service, the whole congregation of St. Luke's walked from the City Hall (where we were meeting at the time) to this site.

A bagpiper led the way. Following him was a crucifer, two flag bearers, members of the congregation and a number of robed clergymen.

Upon the arrival, two bishops led those assembled in a solemn service of blessing and groundbreaking.

I can only imagine what the neighbours thought as this colourful, noisy procession came down the street. But it was more than a parade. It sent out a message: God's people were on the move in Blue Ridge.

For seven years, this small but faithful band had been meeting in the courtroom of the

aforementioned city hall. The judge's bench served as the Altar. Folding chairs as pews. A cabinet in the back as the sacristy.

It was a comfortable place, at least for the time being. After all, the rent was only \$10 a week. But the time had to come to arise and go to the place where God was leading.

The Israelites on the far side of Jordan must have felt the same way

Their journey had been long and arduous, but finally they had arrived at the edge of the land God had promised to give them.

I guess they *could* have done what our forebearers here at St. Luke's *could* have done. They could have stayed put a little while longer, enjoyed the view from afar, imagined what it would be like to be in that land.

But that was really not an option. The Lord God Almighty had given them their marching order: **“Arise and go over Jordan.”**

Going back to St. Luke’s, perhaps some in those days imagined that once they were in their own little Promised Land . . . their little carpenter’s gothic church . . . their journey would be over. They could sit down and rest.

Perhaps some of the Israelites on the far side of Jordan thought the same thing. But it wasn’t to be in either case.

If you think about it, “God’s people on the move” is an appropriate theme as we begin “Pre-Lent”.

This season has three Sunday’s, the first of which is Septuagesima; the second is Sexagesima; the third, Quinquagesima.

These three rather ponderous Latin names refer to the approximate number of days to Easter . . . 70, 60 and 50.

On this Sunday, we begin a journey which will take us to the cross and on to the empty tomb.

Today's Old Testament passage give us some good travel advice as we begin this journey.

This morning I want to highlight three lessons we can learn from the people of God in the long ago.

First lesson: **Focus on faithful service in small things.**

That is what Joshua had done prior to taking the reins of leadership following the death of Moses.

Remember he was one of the 12 spies sent into Canaan to scout out the land. Only he and Caleb returned with a positive report.

The other 10 came back focused on obstacles rather than God's power. Because the people rallied around the naysayers, God determined they were not ready to enter the Promised Land, and so they were forced to wander around in the wilderness for 40 years.

During those 40 years, Joshua quietly served as Moses' assistant, attendant and apprentice. He stayed out of the spotlight, faithfully doing a number of small things well.

That should be our goal as we journey towards the cross, the empty tomb . . . and eventually towards eternity.

Somewhere I saw a sign placed above a kitchen sink reading: **“Divine service is conducted here three times daily.”**

That, my friends, is how it works.

Most Christian service is not done before cameras. It is rather done quietly and most of the time involves the doing small things.

It might be visiting a shut-in, or giving a person who has no transportation a ride to the store, or reading a Bible story to a child, or giving encouragement to someone you meet in the grocery store or laundromat, or speaking truth in a world of falsehood.

Your great moment in the sun may come, as it did for Joshua. Or, it may not. It doesn't matter. What is done for Christ, great or small, counts . . . often more than you will ever know in this life.

Lesson No. 2: **Follow your leader.** In the case of the Israelites, this leader was Joshua.

An interesting thing to note about Joshua is his name. “Joshua” in the language of the Old Testament is the same name as “Jesus” in the New. It means: “Yahweh is salvation”.

Joshua was God’s appointed leader to bring salvation to God’s people . . . to lead them into the Promised Land.

Who is our leader? ///

It is Jesus, the, new better Joshua. He is not only our Saviour, but, according to the writer of Hebrews, our forerunner (*prodromos*). He is the one who goes before and makes the way safe for us to follow . . . yes, all the way through the “valley of the shadow of death”.

He leads us into the new better Promised Land . . . the new heavens and new earth promised in Revelation 21.

Hence, we need take our cues from Him, and from no one else.

But it is easy to get diverted, isn't it?

For example, instead of following Him, it is easy to fall into the trap of taking the lead ourselves, of making up our own game plans.

Living as if everything depended on *me*. I know I find myself doing that more often than I like to admit.

When I do, I have to stop and say: “Jesus Christ is the Lord and leader of my life. He became so in my Baptism. Where He leads I will go.”

There are also many other would-be leaders out there in today's society. Some are very charismatic and alluring.

It the old story of the serpent in the garden all over again. To attract Eve's attention, the serpent appeared to her not as a scaly, ugly lizard, but as charming and erudite creature.

The same is true today. So, be on your guard, remember who your leader is. Follow Him.

WWJD – What would Jesus do? Or perhaps better still: WWJHMD – What would Jesus have me do?

Lesson No. 1: Focus on faithful service in small things.

Lesson No. 2: Follow your leader, and make sure that leader is Jesus.

Finally, Lesson No. 3: Make use of God's promises given in Scripture.

Let them guide and encourage you in dark and difficult times. I am thinking in particular of the one found in today's passage:

“Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”

Meditating on such promises as this is better than whistling in the dark.

Jesus gives us similar encouragement in the New Testament when He concludes His Great Commission with the words:

“Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world [age].”

The central message of both is: You are not alone.

God's people in North Georgia are to remain on the move.

We don't know what challenges we will face along the way, but we do know we don't travel alone. **"The Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."**

Allow me to close with some lines from a hymn written by John Henry Newman which illustrates the third lesson we might draw from today's passage: Follow your leader.

Newman wrote this hymn while in Italy. An illness had delayed his return to England by three weeks. Out of this experience Newman gained new insight in what following your leader looks like in real time. He wrote:

The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on;
I loved to choose and see my path; but now
Lead Thou me on!
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will. Remember not
past years!

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on.
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone.

May we learn to say the same thing as we
continue *our* journey, both individually and as a
church.