

### Numbers 27:15-23 (New Revised Standard Version)

Moses spoke to the Lord, saying, "Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint someone over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep without a shepherd." So the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him; have him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and commission him in their sight. You shall give him some of your authority, so that all the congregation of the Israelites may obey. But he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the decision of the Urim before the Lord; at his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the Israelites with him, the whole congregation." So Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole congregation; he laid his hands on him and commissioned him—as the Lord had directed through Moses.

### Matthew 9:35-38, 10:16 & 40 (New Revised Standard Version)

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

"See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

When I was a much younger man in my late 20's,  
cancer ended the life of my business partner, friend and mentor,  
which left me in-charge of running the corporation.

Right after his funeral, an unsettling truth suddenly hit me ---  
- that the decisions I would be making from then on  
would determine the success or failure of that business,  
and affect the lives of all my employees and their families.

As a fairly young man, I felt the weight of responsibility  
of living into that change and transition of leadership.

**The Numbers passage we read is also about leadership in transition.**

The descendants of the people liberated from Egyptian slavery  
are at the edge of the Promised Land and just about to go in,  
**but Moses won't be leading them when they enter.**

Try to imagine what that might have felt like.

It was Moses who had stood before the mighty ruler, Pharaoh,  
and demanded liberation: God commands you, let my people go.

Moses had called down the plagues that demonstrated God's power,  
against which Pharaoh and his Egyptian gods could not prevail.

High atop Mt. Sinai, in the very presence of Almighty God,  
Moses had received the Ten Commandments on stone tablets,  
and faithfully led the people for 40 years in the wilderness.

That generation had all been born during that wilderness journey.  
The only leader & spokesman for God they'd ever known was Moses,  
who has attended to their needs, both physical and spiritual.

But now, Moses won't be there to follow and rely upon, so, vs. 15~17

Moses spoke to the Lord, saying, "Let the Lord appoint someone over the congregation who shall go out

before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep without a shepherd."

And as it turned out, **God already had all that well-covered.**

Joshua had already demonstrated his trust and confidence in God,  
so it was really just a matter of confirming God's call, vs. 18-20

So the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him; have him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and commission him in their sight. You shall give him some of your authority, so that all the congregation of the Israelites may obey.

40 years earlier, the first time they came near the Promised Land,

Moses had sent out twelve men to spy and check out the land.

Ten of them returned fearful, insisting that even with God's help,  
it would not be possible to conquer the land God had promised them.

Their fear convinced the people to rebel against God and Moses,  
and complain that it had been a terrible mistake to leave Egypt...

... and so God declared,  
none of that generation would enter the Promised Land.

But two of the spies sent by Moses, Joshua and Caleb  
did trust God and urged, let's move in now, immediately  
and see how God will accomplish his promise & victory.

**They had no doubt that God would fulfill his word as promised.**

And by that, Joshua demonstrated the kind of leadership God wanted.

Therefore, after Moses,  
Joshua would lead the people to conquer the land...

... and so that they would not be like sheep without a shepherd.

That phrase, image and metaphor, like sheep without a shepherd

was also used by several Old Testament prophets,  
to describe many of the failed leaders of Israel  
who had not been obedient or faithful to the Lord God,  
but had betrayed God's call and the people's trust.

When Matthew uses that same phrase, like sheep without a shepherd

he is drawing from that same Old Testament image and metaphor,  
**connecting the failed and unfaithful leaders of the OT  
to the scribes and Pharisees in conflict against Jesus.**

Like bad shepherds, they were not caring for the people of God,  
and had no compassion for the lost, the outcast and struggling.

Matthew highlights the stark contrast between Jesus

and the self-serving and hypocritical religious leaders, vs. 35-36

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Matthew is showing how the life and ministry and mission of Jesus

was in fulfillment of God's promises throughout the Old Test.,  
and that Jesus Christ truly was the good shepherd being opposed  
by the religious leaders, who lacked compassion for God's people.

In his compassion, Jesus recognized the great need,

and points ahead toward the mission of the Church vs. 37-38, 10:16

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

Here Jesus is describing the true mission of the Church,

the ministry of discipleship passed down through the generations,  
the plentiful harvest of human need and too few laborers,

the lost & wounded of our world like sheep without a shepherd.

**Here is how all that connects & relates to do us & to our lives today.**

1<sup>st</sup>, Over the next few weeks and months,  
our church officer nominating committee will begin meeting,  
whose task is crucial to the life and mission of this church.

They are charged to discern the voice and call of the Holy Spirit,  
and then, place the names of church members into nomination,  
those whom they believe that God has called and equipped  
to serve as our church officers, as elders and deacons...

... and the faithfulness and effectiveness of the Session and deacons  
will depend on those nominations & who our congregation elects...  
... on whether or not we have truly listened to the Holy Spirit.

I cannot overemphasize how important this is, especially  
during this season of rebuilding our church's ministries.

The nominating committee will begin their work of discerning soon,  
therefore I am asking that each one of us, that is all of us,  
please pray diligently for them all through the process---

- that they will listen and heed the Holy Spirit's guidance,  
**and that if you are invited to serve as a church officer,  
that you will carefully & prayerfully consider your call.**

The question of leadership & call is an important one to us, & to God,  
for the quality and faithfulness of our church leadership  
certainly influences the spiritual welfare of God's people.

2<sup>nd</sup>, and this is critically important for us to believe & understand,  
that **ministry is not about just elders, deacons and pastors,**  
for we are all, each one of us called and equipped by God  
**to grow in our faith by serving the Lord usefully,**  
by allowing the grace and compassion of God  
to flow through us freely out into the world...

**... so that our thoughts, words and deeds actually do make a difference.**

Whoever we are, whatever our context and situation in life  
**there is always some way that we can live out our faith,**  
some way to make a positive difference in someone's life.

You don't have to be very strong or vigorous to pray well,  
or to send a hopeful and encouraging note or email,  
or the brighten someone's day with a phone call.

**To follow Jesus, means active faith, generosity and compassion.**

In various ways at various times, each of us has some opportunity  
to make a real difference and have some influence toward good.

Authentic Christian faith is much more than just getting into Heaven.

We are all uniquely called and equipped to serve God well.

A faithful Christian life is about being active and productive,  
so that we are **all** serving usefully in the Kingdom of God.

Beyond simply continuing to be a Christian each day,

**I hope that my faith is deeper today than it was yesterday,  
though not as deep and faithful as I hope it'll be tomorrow...**

... and that means that I am trying to walk ever closer more faithfully.

**I want to use my life, my time and resources to serve well,  
so that my life and interactions do proclaim the Good News.**

And do bring blessings, peace & justice, overcoming evil & turmoil.

**God's purpose is grace,** to heal human sin, strife and brokenness,  
to further our spiritual development, **for us to grow closer to God  
by deepening and improving our walk of faith with Jesus Christ...**

... and by recognizing our unique place and purpose within God's plan.

**Whatever our situation or circumstance, tribulation, worry or fear  
our call is to live in hope, trust and faithfully serve well  
along whatever journey the Lord has laid out before us.**

Fellow laborers & fellow disciples, we are each one of us  
**blessed and equipped by God to make a difference in this world,**  
so that we can have a positive influence toward goodness.

Sometimes, God chooses to answer our prayers by putting us to work,  
perhaps to strengthen or encourage someone's journey of faith,  
or to let grace, patience and compassion soften a conflict,  
or to proclaim God's relentless love to the discouraged and beaten,  
and thereby make God's love visible by my words, deeds & attitude.

3<sup>rd</sup>, since we do recognize today as Father's Day,  
it seems appropriate to put some focus on what that might mean.  
Thinking & reflecting on the meaning of faithful & godly fatherhood,  
reminds me of a painting I saw of a young child's bedroom at night.

There is the soft glow of moonlight streaming in through a window  
shining onto the child's face sleeping peacefully and secure  
looking serene & content with a sense of blessed well-being.  
You can clearly see & feel that all is right with that child's world.

And kneeling at the foot of the bed there is a man, the father,  
kneeling with his head bowed down, and his eyes closed,  
a faithful, loving and godly father in earnest fervent prayer.

**The painting conveys a sense of his strength,**  
a physical protector present, a loving guide to that child.  
**There is also a powerful sense of vulnerability,**  
this father's visible submission under the power & authority of God  
in humble intercession on behalf of that precious beloved child.

It is a very moving and compelling snapshot of true fatherhood -  
a faithful father seeking God's blessings in the life of his child.  
That painting shows a man  
whose faith and walk with God is deep, real and authentic  
as to permeate all of life, in everything he says and does...  
... not an ostentatious or showy faith to impress others,  
yet also not shy about the priority of God in his life.

The question at hand is fatherly influence and responsibility  
which is far more than just a Hallmark greeting card occasion.

Today we gratefully celebrate and honor the steadfast faithfulness  
of our Heavenly Father, our biological fathers who gave us life,  
and those many others who provide healthy masculine role models.

On this Father's Day let us celebrate and honor faithful fathers --  
**all** those men who serve so well in that role of blessing children,  
**all** who give of themselves on the behalf of a child,  
regardless of whether or not they share the same DNA.

Today we honor all who actually do the tasks of nurture & admonition,  
including stepfathers, uncles, grandfathers, neighbors,  
scoutmasters, coaches, teachers and many other mentors---  
-- **all** those who provide spiritual guidance & example,  
**all** who are such a blessing to our dear children.

The focus and question is about our influence on our children.  
From the life-priorities and values that you have actually modeled,  
how important would your children say it is to live a life of faith?

Surely a child is the very pinnacle of God marvelous creation,

and consider, that God trusts and allows **us** to influence them,  
granting to **us**, to make a real difference in a child's life...  
...for as influencers we're all given an awesome task & responsibility.

God has called us to teach and show our children what we believe,  
to pass on our faith, to instill worthy values and character,  
to pass along integrity down through the coming generations,  
and in a sense to let them **stand upon our shoulders**.

Jesus describes it this way, **Matthew 5:14-16**

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."