*After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’s 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 lead this people to possess 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.”* Joshua 1:1-10

*So, we are always confident, even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to be pleasing to Him. For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive due recompense for actions done in the body, whether good or evil. For the love of Christ urges us on because we are convinced that One has died for all; therefore, all have died. And He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for the One who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we no longer know Him in that way. So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!*

2 Corinthians 5:6-10, 14-17

*A young woman’s leaving for collage got her mother a fax machine and suggested sending their correspondence by fax instead of using the post office. Although she told her many times that it was a faster and less expensive way to communicate, her mother continued to send her mail by weekly letters. At Christmas, however, her mother showed that she now had a full grasp of the technology. She faxed a $100 bill with the note: “Merry Christmas, Darling. You’re right, it is cheaper to fax than to mail. Love, Mom.”*

Following God’s Way.

1. It is never easy to follow in the footsteps of a powerful leader. This is true whether we talk about a political leader, a charismatic teacher, or a powerful preacher. Apparently, William Shakespeare is attributed to saying: *“Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.”* Paraphrasing his words, Frank Herbert in his masterpiece *“Dune”* writes: *“A great man doesn't seek to lead, he's called to it.”* This is especially true when God thrusts greatness upon someone. That someone, whoever it is, cannot back off from that greatness, but must accept it and go ahead. This happened to Moses, and as we see in today’s Scriptures Reading, this has also occurred to Joshua. When God approached Joshua, he accepted the challenge, got ready to gather the people, and to enter the land that they were searching for, for forty years, what we call today *“the* *wilderness experience.”* They have been there, at the borders of Canaan before, but at that time the Hebrews were afraid to enter the land. Only Joshua and Caleb trusted God and were willing to conquer the land already then. Now, once again, God placed this task before them, but this time Joshua is unhinged, and with God’s guidance, he leads people into the *“Promised Land.”*

2. Prior to being charged by God with the task of entering the *“Promised Land,”* Canaan, the Scriptures referred to Joshua a number of times, most notably in the Exodus 17:8-16 where he is the one who *“defeated the Amalekite army”* in the battle of Rephidim. Later on, also in the Exodus 24:13, and 33:11, he is called *“an aid”* of Moses, the one who stayed in the *“tent of meeting,”* known otherwise as the *“tabernacle.”* Joshua’s role in the past indicates that by spending a lot of time in Moses’ presence he was *“groomed”* by Moses to become the leader God would call following Moses’ death. We might not know how old Joshua was when the Hebrews left Egypt, although the word *“young”* in Exodus 33:11 indicates he might have been in his early twenties, but we may be fairly certain that he knew hardship of slavery as well as the hardship of the forty years of wandering the desert of Sinai. He was placed in the position of a military strategist, according to Exodus 17:9, although it is doubtful that he has had previously a significant military experience. What is more important, is the fact that he trusted God, and that God will help the Israelites leading them into the battles, including the battles to conquer the “Promised Land.

3. In the Numbers 14:7b-8 we read that after going into the Canaan with the twelve other spies, only Joshua and Caleb believed they would conquer the land. In his concluding speech Joshua, placing his faith in God said: *“The land that we went through as spies is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey.”* Only a person who firmly trusts God could be as certain as Joshua was, so, when God called him to lead the Hebrews and to enter the Canaan, Joshua responded to this call without hesitation. He knew that he is stepping into the footsteps of a giant, Moses, but he was not afraid to do so, because he knew God is with him just as He was with Moses. The true spiritual leader is the one who fully trusts God and follows the Lord even when everyone else does not want to or expresses any form of doubt. Joshua was not afraid to face the wrath of the ten spies who returned from the Canaan fearful, although he and Caleb were in obvious minority, because He knew that nothing is impossible for God. Now, on the eve of a decisive battle, he trusts God, knowing that the conquest of the *“Promised Land”* will be successful, exactly because of God’s promise, and God’s presence with His people.

4. When God calls us, no matter what the task it may be, we must accept it, just as Joshua did, leading the people into the land promised them long time ago in the *“call of Abram,”* who later on became Abraham, the patriarch. When called by God we must not search for excuses or focus on obstacles even if and when the obstacles truly exist, but we must respond with making all the necessary preparations, looking to God as the source of our strength, motivation, and resolve. Just like Joshua did. As a young man I never believed I was cut to be a preacher, much less in a foreign land and able to master the foreign language, but God has had His plans when He called me to do exactly that. I have witnessed His guidance in my entire life, although I was not always ready to accept His call. I still may often feel quite inadequate to do the task God placed before me, but what I learned over all these years is that God’s call is always relevant and must come to us first before we decide to do anything. If we are truly are ready to serve Him and follow His commands without hesitation, we must accept His call when it comes, without searching for reasons why God has chosen us to do whatever He chose us to do. We might never know, or we may discover the reasons along the way, nevertheless we may rest assured that God calls us according to the gifts we already received from Him. God has a reason, but we must also be careful not to became convinced of God’s calling, if it is us who want to do something, to prove to God, that we are able to do this. Following God’s commands might not be easy, but it surely was not easy for Joshua to carry the torch of the leadership of the nation after Moses’ death.

5. Deuteronomy 34:9 says that Joshua was *“filled with the spirit of wisdom"* and people listened to him, just as they listen to Moses. It is important, especially in the leadership role, to possess the *“spirit of wisdom,”* not necessarily the knowledge, but the spirit of wisdom. The knowledge is important, but what good is the knowledge without true spirit of wisdom? When I was still a young man in Poland, I learned that: *“As the species we possessed the knowledge to harness the atom and to build the atomic bomb, but it is the spirit of wisdom that prevents us from starting the nuclear war.”* Wisdom is what helps us to make right choices and Joshua was able to make them because he was responding to God, the true *“giver of wisdom.”* Wisdom helped Joshua to keep the words of the *“Book of the Law.”* The Scriptures says in Joshua 1:8: *“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.”* If we are to be used by God in any way, we must not only to study His Word and to draw our strength from Him, but we must also be *“filled”* with the Word of God and must let the Holy Spirit to help us to understand and to apply His Word in our daily life. The true wisdom comes only from there, from the Word of God, and when filled with the understanding of His Word, we are ready to be used by God. Just as Joshua was.

6. Joshua was a man of boldness. He proved this when he stood against the ten spies who went with him and Caleb to search the Canaan. *“We can beat them,”* he insisted,despite of what the other ten were saying. He also, in Joshua 24:15 said these powerful words: *“Do whatever you want, but me and my house we will serve the Lord.”* Great leaders must sometimes make decisions that are not popular with the crowds, but to do this they need strength and courage, and Joshua possessed such courage because God has given it to him. In Joshua 1:18 God says: *“Whoever rebels against your orders and disobeys your words, whatever you command, shall be put to death. Only be strong and courageous.”* Such leaders, however, must be certain that their courage and boldness comes from God, not from their own desire to exercise own power. We often make decision based on what the people may say, how the people may respond, and because of that we witness today to the truth not to be the truth anymore, but the *“accommodation”* to the whims of others. Today, too many times two plus two becomes five instead of four, just to appease some. Our society has become *“obliging”* to the caprices of others, because we do not want to offend anyone. Everything seems to be *“alleged,”* not with the sentiment: *“caught with the hand in a cookie jar,”* but instead with *“allegedly caught.”* The *“crime”* is not a *“crime”* anymore, it is rather the *“circumstance of one’s childhood,”* or of the *“racial background disadvantage,”* or it is the result of the *“social injustice.” “Hate”* is not *“hate”* anymore but a *“political language,” “sin”* is no more *“sin,”* but *a “choice,” and “lie”* is not a *“lie,”* but a *“journalistic privilege”* or a *“legal discourse.”*

7. Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians in 4:5-6 that there is only: *“One Lord, One faith, One baptism: ‘One God the Father of all,’ who is over all and in all,”* but today, even the Church leadership, fearful of offending someone, often does not want to acknowledge this. A few years ago, at the Green Lake conference, the Wisconsin UCC leadership hosted Jewish and Muslim leaders to teach about what they believe. I did not have a problem learning about the similarities and the differences between these three religions, but I had and still have a problem with making a sign of equality between all three of them. As much as I might respect what the Jews and the Muslims believe, I will never accept the premises neither of Judaism or of Islam concept of salvation, because for me salvation comes only through the sacrifice of Jesus, and neither the Judaism nor Islam accepts Jesus as the Lord and Savior. Appeasing others for fear of offending them runs contrary to the boldness Joshua expressed. *“Me and my house we will serve the Lord.”*

8. Joshua was not sitting on the fence waiting for the better time to come. He made a decision to follow God and his life was built on this decision. He did not hesitate, he did not procrastinate, he responded to God’s voice immediately. As a leader of the nation, he did not hesitate to call on the people to make the right decisions. *“Fear the Lord, serve Him sincerely and truthfully, and leave behind the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the river (Jordan) and in Egypt.”* (Joshua 24:14). He was honest with the people telling them that they have a choice, but in this he wanted them to make a proper one, the choice that will allow them to live fruitful and blessed life. He was indeed a true spiritual leader worthy of Moses’ succession. Today, we need more true spiritual leaders who will lead us boldly into the future, learning from Joshua and following in his obedience to God. We need it as the Church, and the world needs it as the civilization, or we will face not only the spiritual, but even the physical demise, as the Church and as the world.