

INI - SDG

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday a. Trinity

July 10, 2011

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Hecla

Series: Joshua 03

Text: Joshua 1:12-18 ***And to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh Joshua said, "Remember the word that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, 'The LORD your God is providing you a place of rest and will give you this land.' Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land that Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but all the men of valor among you shall pass over armed before your brothers and shall help them, until the LORD gives rest to your brothers as he has to you, and they also take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to the land of your possession and shall possess it, the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise." And they answered Joshua, "All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you, as he was with Moses! Whoever rebels against your commandment and disobeys your words, whatever you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and courageous."***

Theme: THE BLESSINGS OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP: "HELP THEM"

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

Fellowship - it seems like whenever we at Prince of Peace or in the Church of the Lutheran Confession are talking about fellowship, our minds immediately go to the negative aspects of church fellowship. Namely, we think of how we are to faithfully apply Romans 16:17-18 (***"Watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them."*** ESV) and avoid false teachers and false teaching church bodies. And there is good reason for this reaction. It was false teaching about this very matter that led to the formation of our church body.

Yet there are many positive aspects of fellowship, one of which we want to consider this morning. Fellowship simply means a sharing something in common. Farmers have a certain fellowship, because they share in common the toils and struggles of working the earth for a living. As believers in Christ we share Jesus in common. Paul writes to Ephesians, ***"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*** (Eph 4:4-5) Every believer in Christ has been called into His holy Christian Church. The Church is one. One body - with Jesus Christ as her one head. And in this fellowship we are called on to care not only for our own spiritual well-being, but for the spiritual well-being of our fellow believer in Christ.

As we continue our series on the book of Joshua we see that the blessings of Christian

fellowship were an active part of the lives of Old Testament believers. Let us consider the blessings of Christian fellowship as we hear the words of Joshua to the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh to help their fellow Israelites secure their inheritance and rest. May God bless us through His word and strengthen the bond of our fellowship in Christ.

Moses was beside himself. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. How could they ask for such a thing? Had they forgotten already? You see, the Children of Israel were finally on the eastern banks of the Jordan River, ready to enter the Promised Land of Canaan. The land that the LORD God had promised to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as an inheritance to their descendants. And now the time had come to take possession of that Promised Land.

All were ready to enter, it seemed, except for two and a half of the twelve tribes of Israel. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh asked Moses to receive their land inheritance on the east of the Jordan. You see, they were ranchers and they thought that the land east of the Jordan was perfect for their large number of livestock. They said to Moses, ***"If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants for a possession. Do not take us across the Jordan."*** (Num 32:5)

To Moses this was treasonous. It sounded to him as though they were saying the same thing their rebellious parents said 40 years earlier. Their parents did not trust in the LORD to deliver Canaan into their hands. Their parents complained about being freed from Egypt and were ready to kill Joshua and Moses, and choose new leaders. For this reason the LORD caused their parents wandered in the wilderness for 40 years until that entire generation died. And now it seemed that the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh were about to repeat the sins of their parents.

I think we can all understand why they would not want to cross the Jordan. They had already found what they wanted. They had territory they wanted to raise their families. A land that was perfect for raising their livestock. Why should they go any further? Why go into Canaan and risk their lives? Why not just settle down in their own land and begin their lives? They had already received the inheritance and the rest that the LORD had promised in this new land.

We kind of feel the same way sometimes, don't we. God has showered amazing blessings of grace on each individual believer in Christ. Each individual believer has been given rest in Jesus. Rest for our conscience knowing Jesus has paid for every last one of our sins when He died on the cross. Rest for our souls knowing that we are at peace with God because Jesus has reconciled us to Him through His death and resurrection.

As the redeemed children of God our inheritance has also been secured. The eternal inheritance of heaven has been secured for us through Jesus. Through faith, His perfect life is credited to us as righteousness. His sinless death on the cross has cleansed us from all our sins. As His redeemed children heaven has been opened to us and given to us as a free gift. Jesus purchased the inheritance of heaven for us by His life and by His death, and He gives it to us freely as a gift of grace. Peter writes that God has begotten us to a living hope in Christ Jesus, ***"To an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."*** (1 Pt 1:4-5) In Christ, heaven is ours! It's a done deal! An inheritance purchased and secured for us by Christ.

Before Joshua led the Children of Israel across the Jordan to take possession of Canaan, he reminded those two and a half tribes of what they promised Moses they would do. ***“Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land that Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but all the men of valor among you shall pass over armed before your brothers and shall help them, until the LORD gives rest to your brothers as he has to you, and they also take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to the land of your possession and shall possess it, the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise.”***

Even though the two and a half tribes had what they wanted, they were not to forget about their brothers. They were to help them in their battles until the LORD gave them rest and they took possession of their promised inheritance. But notice what they needed to do first before they could help their brethren win their battles - their men of valor first had to arm themselves. Then they would pass before their brethren, armed and ready to fight for them, helping them win the battles and receive their rest.

Can you imagine what a boost that would be for the nine and a half other tribes? Here were their brothers, who already had what they wanted, and yet they were willing to put their lives on the line to help them secure their rest and inheritance in the Promised Land. They were willing to go into battle, fight, and possibly die for the benefit of their brethren. This is the blessing of Christian fellowship, as they help their brethren by fighting for and with them.

We have been made members of the body of Christ. As members of the body of Christ, we are members of one another. Paul writes to the Romans, ***“So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”*** (Rom 4:25) We belong not only to the same body, but to one another. As members of one another, we are called to strengthen and encourage our fellow members in their walk with Christ. We are to “help them.” Not help them in physical warfare, like those two and a half tribes did, but help our brethren them in their spiritual warfare.

But in order to best help our fellow believer in Christ in their walk of faith, we must first arm ourselves. We need to grow in the faith, in our relationship with Christ, so that we can then help our brethren. We need ourselves to make use of the weapons which the LORD has supplied to us for our own spiritual battles. We need to spend time in the Word ourselves and make diligent use of the Sacrament. These are the tools God has given us to strengthen and sustain our faith. Having been armed by the Holy Spirit through His Means of Grace, we can then help our brethren in their spiritual battles.

What an amazing picture this makes when each Christian, growing in Christ through the Means of Grace, then seeks to help their fellow believer grow in Christ! Each member of the body of Christ supporting and strengthening one another in this journey of faith we are making to the Promised Land of heaven.

What are some ways we can “help them?” Well, one way is to encourage one another when we come together here at church. We read in Hebrews 10, ***“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”*** (Heb 10:24-25) As the Last Days grow closer and closer, the times will become more and more difficult for Christians. That is why we need to encourage one

another. Stir one another up in love and good works. When you visit with one another, don't just ask about the crops and the weather, ask about what challenges they are facing - spiritually. Pray for your fellow believers. If you know of a particular spiritual battle they are going through, pray specifically about that.

When one of our brethren is struggling either emotionally or maybe materially, be ready to do all you can to help them. Remember what the Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh were willing to do for their brethren? They were willing to fight for them until the LORD gave them rest and they took possession of their inheritance. They put their love into action. Doing all they could to help their brethren. In the same way, John writes, ***"My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."*** (1Jn 3:18)

You Grandfathers and Grandmothers, you have raised your children and they have left home. Now you can help the next generation of Christian parents by encouraging them, sharing your experiences with them, and pray for them. And for we who are in the midst of training up our children in the Lord, let us listen and heed the counsel of our elders. We have much to learn from those who have been there and done that before us. There are countless ways which we can help our fellow believer in their walk of faith.

But no one has fought and helped their brethren in the way that Jesus has. Jesus fought for His brethren and laid down His life to save them. He led the way and cleared the path before us to heaven. He fought off sin and paid our penalty for it when He died on the cross. He fought off the temptations of the devil and was victorious. He led the charge to death and defeated death by rising from it. He helped us in a way that no one else could. He rescued us from hell, gives rest to our souls now in time and hereafter in eternity, and He gives us the eternal inheritance of eternal life in heaven. May Jesus arm us that we may help our fellow believers in Christ until together we cross the Jordan's pearly stream to the Promised Land of heaven. Amen.

Oh, may Thy soldiers, faithful, true and bold,  
Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old  
And win with them the victor's crown of gold.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!

The golden evening brightens in the west;  
Soon, soon, to faithful warriors cometh rest.  
Sweet is the calm of Paradise the blest.  
Alleluia! Alleluia! (TLH 463:3,8)