

Saints Triumphant (November 18, 2018)	Pastor Willitz	1762
O. T. Lesson: Daniel 12:1-3	The Common Service: p. 15	
Epistle: Hebrews 10:11-18		551 vv.1-4
Gospel: John 5:25-29		Psalm 118
Text: Hebrews 11:22		550
Theme: <u>Sure To The End.</u>	Offering: 434 v. 3	
I. Sure enough to prophesy by God's promises.	Communion: 170	
II. Sure enough to die in God's promises.		551 vs. 5-8
III. Sure enough to make others swear by God's promises.		

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

Hebrews 11:22

By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.

Lord God, Heavenly Father, sanctify us by your truth; your word is truth. Amen.

Dear fellow believers,

It must have been a curious burial. A ruler of the then world power of Egypt died, but they buried him far off in the land of Canaan. The man had lived to be 110 years old, but contrary to what we would expect, his children, grand-children, and great-grand-children were not present at his burial, for they had all died many years before this burial. They buried a man who had been dead for 400 years, and that man was Joseph. The Israelites in Egypt kept Joseph's bones for 350 years, and then carried those bones with them on their long 40 year journey through the wilderness, and when God won the victory for them and gave them possession of the Promised Land, they buried those bones of Joseph in Shechem, the heart of the land of Canaan.

It may seem strange, but those were Joseph's clear instructions to his family before he died, that when God would bring the Israelites out of Egypt to the Promised Land of Canaan, they were to carry his bones along, and bury him in the land of Canaan. It may seem unimportant, but it was very important, because that dying wish of Joseph was evidence of his faith, for which he is listed among the Old Testament heroes of faith in that well-known chapter of the book of Hebrews. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see." Such a sure faith Joseph displayed, even while dying -- Sure To The End. Sure enough to prophesy by God's promises. Sure enough to die in God's promises. Sure enough to make others swear by God's promises.

A person's last words are often remembered and highly regarded. They are often significant. If there is something important to say, the death bed is often the place where it will be heard. Joseph made good use of his last breaths, as it were. At the very end of the book of Genesis, we read, "Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father's family. He lived a hundred and ten years and saw the third generation of Ephraim's children. Also the children of Makir son of Manasseh were placed at birth on Joseph's knees. Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, 'God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.' So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt." Joseph's last words were basically a prediction of the future.

He "spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt;" that God would surely bring his people to the Promised Land of Canaan. Joseph was sure that this would happen, sure enough to use his last words speaking it.

Joseph could be so sure, because what he spoke was God's promise; that promise God repeated so often to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars. I will give them the land of Canaan." And then the third part of that promise, in which the other two parts find their significance, "Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed." And that promised offspring is the Savior, Jesus, whose blessings upon the nations we see so clearly now and will see even more clearly on the Last Day when the dead are raised and all believers, all saints triumphant, are taken in glory to heaven. Four-hundred years earlier, during the great famine, when Joseph's father, Jacob, the Patriarch of God's people Israel, had set out to go to Egypt, God said to him, "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again."

Joseph's dying words were simply an echo of God's promises, and at the center was the promise of the Savior, Jesus. Joseph knew that God's promise would come true, because he had seen the finger of God controlling events in the past--he knew that God's will is done. Oh, Joseph must have wondered if God's will is done when his brothers sold him to the Midianite caravan, to be a slave in Egypt. He must have wondered if God's will is done when he was thrown into prison after refusing to commit adultery with Potiphar's wife. But later, when Joseph found himself second in command in Egypt, providing food for many during the seven-year famine, providing for his own family, the people of God's promise, he saw God's plan, and told his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives....God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then it was not you who sent me here, but God."

As sure as God had guided the events of the past, so sure Joseph knew that God would guide the events of the future to carry out his promise. Joseph's was a faith that did not ask "what ifs." "What if a new king who does not remember me comes into power in Egypt?" "What if he says, 'The Israelites have become much too numerous for us,' and puts slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor?" "What if Pharaoh gives the order, 'Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile River!'" "Even if the Israelites do somehow get out of Egypt, what if they are afraid to enter the land of Canaan because of the strong nations living there?--What if they end up wandering in the wilderness?" All these "what ifs" did happen, but God's promises are greater than any "what ifs." Joseph did not know how or when God would carry out his promises, but he knew God would. Joseph was sure, sure enough to prophesy by God's promises.

Joseph's prophesy did not come to naught, for we have the greater privilege of seeing those promises of God fulfilled. Yes, we know how God brought his nation of Israel out of Egypt and gave them the land of Canaan. But more than that, we see the deeper part of that promise fulfilled, the salvation of mankind carried out. We see fulfilled God's promise of the Savior, sent through his people Israel, in that chosen land of Canaan. We see Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And we hear his dying words: "Father forgive them," as he suffered for our sins. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" as God punished him for our sins. And his final words, "It is finished!" as our forgiveness was complete, the salvation of mankind carried out. When we die, and God by his great grace takes us to his heavenly home, when we are "Saints Triumphant,"

then all of God's promises to us will be carried out!

What will your last words be? Surely we hope that we, like Joseph, will have opportunity to confess our faith to our loved ones at the time of our death. And if that faith is worth using those precious last breaths to confess, which it is, then it is certainly also worth confessing with every breath during our life. We need not wait until we're on our death bed to say something truly worth while.

Joseph was at the point of death. His end was near. For too many people, that is a frightful time, because they think that death is the end, the end of everything. That horror is noticeably lacking in Joseph. Instead of dying in fear, Joseph died in trust. Instead of dying in unbelief, Joseph died in faith. For him, death was not an uncertainty. No, Joseph was sure, sure enough to die in God's promises. He looked beyond his death and saw God's promises fulfilled in Jesus, saw his own everlasting salvation in heaven.

Joseph knew that it was not the end for his bones. That is why he gave instructions about those bones. Joseph had been second in command only to Pharaoh in Egypt. Surely he could have had his bones preserved for a long time in some fancy pyramid, but he gave definite instructions otherwise, because God's promises proclaimed something more glorious for those bones. God would put them together again on the last day, and put the flesh back on, so that in his flesh, Joseph, like Job, and like us, will see God, his very eyes behold him.

But until that day, Joseph wanted his bones to be buried in the land of Canaan, the land where the promise of salvation would be fulfilled. He wanted to be buried in the land where the Savior would walk, the land where the Savior would perform his mighty deeds and win the victory over death, so that those bones would come to life--this time perfectly for all eternity.

Joseph was sure enough to die in God's promises. God grant us such a sure faith when our end draws near. Death holds no terror for us, because Jesus suffered our terror in his death, and won for us eternal life. Nor do we need to wait until death to enjoy God's promises. That forgiveness, and the peace, comfort and joy of eternal life is ours already now. If God's promises are sure enough to die in, which they are, then they are also sure enough to live in from day to day, while we wait for that day when we will experience them in full reality.

People often leave a will for their family when they die. The will contains instructions concerning what is to be done with the estate; and if there are minor children, how they are to be cared for. These instructions are expected to be carried out very accurately, and in our country the courts also enforce wills.

Joseph left a will for his family, a spoken will, but none-the-less, a will that he expected them to carry out. He made his family swear an oath, "God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Then you must carry my bones up from this place." Do you see what Joseph was doing? He was making his family swear an oath on the basis of God's oath. God had promised to give the land of Canaan to the Children of Israel. Joseph simply made them promise to bury him there when they got there. It would be cruel for someone near death to force their loved ones to make a promise that could never be kept. What guilt that would cause their loved ones. But this was a promise Joseph knew his family could keep. Joseph was sure that God would keep his promise, sure enough to make others swear by God's promises.

Joseph no doubt could have had his family take his body to Canaan and bury it immediately after he died. That's what had been done with his father Jacob when he died. The family, accompanied by all of Pharaoh's officials, went and buried Jacob in

Canaan. But Joseph wanted his family to wait for however long it took, until God would bring them out of Egypt, and give them possession of the Promised Land. "Then you must carry my bones up from this place."

What an inheritance Joseph left to his family in his bones, and in that oath. Those bones spoke a continuous testimony that God's promises are true. What a message those bones spoke, when 350 years later, Moses led the people out of Egypt, and we read in Exodus 13: "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath." What a message those bones spoke when God's people Israel stood on the other side of the Red Sea, having crossed on dry ground, with a wall of water to their right and to their left, and the enemy army of Pharaoh, washed up dead on the shore. What a sermon those bones preached when the Israelites in their lack of faith refused to enter the promised land, and instead had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, carrying those bones with them wherever they went. What a message those bones proclaimed, when finally the promised land was Israel's home, and those bones were buried in Shechem. What a message those bones spoke as Jesus was born, lived, died, and rose from the dead, and what a message those bones still speak and will speak when Jesus returns to raise those bones from the dead, a Saint Triumphant in his blood! And what a message those bones speak to you and to me today. "By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones."

Faith is being sure, sure enough to make others swear by God's promises. When we die, it is not unfair for us to expect our sons and daughters to put our bodies in the ground in the sure hope of the resurrection to life everlasting. When our children are born, we baptize them fully expecting that they will remain in our Christian faith, sure to the end, and promising to do everything in the power God gives us to see to it that that happens. When people are confirmed in our church, we make them swear by God's promises to remain sure in the faith to the end, and suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it. Faith understands that God's promises are true for others as well as for ourselves. May our faith boldly impress itself upon others, especially those dear and close to us.

Joseph saw God's promises, all culminating in the Savior, and he was sure. Joseph, in the certainty of his faith, looked beyond his death, walked not only the road to the Promised Land, but through God's sure promises walked the road to Calvary and saw his salvation carried out on the cross of his Savior. Joseph saw the Promised Land of heaven, where he now resides a Saint Triumphant, and where there is a place for each one of us. What an encouragement for us whose faith so often trusts so little, and whose eyes so seldom see so far. God has given us the privilege of seeing the reality of those promises carried out; a perfect Savior who gave his life on a cross for us. God grant us a faith that remains sure to the end, that sees our heavenly home, and ourselves as Saints Triumphant in Christ.

Amen.

May he who began a good work in you carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ. Amen.