

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost  
September 26, 2004  
St. Mark's Lutheran Church  
Watertown, WI  
Pastor William Heiges

**Joshua 14: 6-14** *Now the men of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me. I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, but my brothers who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt with fear. I, however, followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly. So on that day Moses swore to me, 'The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly.'*

*"Now then, just as the Lord promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the desert. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said."*

*Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the Lord, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.*

My dear fellow, aging with attitude warriors for Christ,

There are some things that are simply inevitable in life, things you can't change. One of them is paying taxes. Another is growing older. It happens to all of us and it happens fast. Some people deny it. Some dread it. Some simply accept it and some challenge the fact.

You know you're getting older when:

- Most of your dreams are reruns
- You sit down in a rocking chair and can't get it started
- The little old gray-haired lady you walk across the street is your wife
- You sink your teeth into a nice, big, juicy steak, and they stay there

If we're not careful as we age, we'll find ourselves falling into a negative rut of inactivity, like the gentleman who admitted:

I get up each morning, and dust off my wits,  
Pick up the paper and read the obits.  
If my name is missing, I know I'm not dead  
So I eat a good breakfast and go back to bed.

I propose that the single most important factor (after a person's relationship with God through faith in Christ) in living out a full, complete and happy life all the way to the end – is that person's **attitude!** I like Pastor Werner's favorite T-shirt. It says, "Growing old is inevitable; Growing up is optional!" That kind of describes him, doesn't it? He's got attitude. There are many older people, many of them are our members, who inspire me. You'll never find any mothball odors clinging to them, no moss growing on them. They stay busy and active serving the Lord and other people. You get the impression they are going to live life large right up to the very end. Today we are going to meet someone just like that in the Book of Joshua. His name is Caleb.

Caleb has a contagious attitude toward life you just want to catch. At age 85 Caleb isn't ready for a rocking chair and retirement. No, he's ready to tackle mountains and take on giants. What about you and your attitude toward life and aging?

### **ARE YOU READY TO TACKLE MOUNTAINS AND TAKE ON GIANTS?**

Or have you bought into and accepted the "I'm over the hill!" kind of thinking? I believe there are four negative attitudes that threaten to ruin a person's productivity in life and especially in old age:

1. **USELESSNESS** – "I'm over the hill!" "I just get in the way." "I don't have anything to contribute anymore." "I'll just step aside and let the young bucks take over." The apostle Paul blasts that kind of worthless thinking in the advice he gave to two young pastors, Timothy and Titus. In the letters he wrote, Paul advised these two young pastors to instruct the older men to mentor the younger men in their congregations. God had set it up that the younger men would sit at the feet of the older men and listen, watch and learn. The older men would model their faith, use their experience and wisdom to teach the younger men how to handle problems, and teach by example. The young men had a lot to learn from the older men. The same was true with women. The older women were instructed to teach the younger women how to love their husbands and children and manage their homes effectively. The older generations with their collective years of wisdom and experience have a lot to teach us younger people. No one is useless or "over the hill!"
2. **GUILT** – Some have too much time on their hands to think, so they reflect back negatively on the past. They think of all the mistakes they made, opportunities they passed up, their failures and poor choices and say to themselves, "I blew it...if only I had a chance to do it all over again, I'd..." It's a good thing God has the perfect antidote for guilt. If anyone had a reason to look on his past and drown himself with guilt it would be King David. In fact he once wrote, "*My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear*" (Ps 38:4). But David knew what to do with guilt. He also wrote, "*Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord' – and you forgave the guilt of my sin*" (Ps 32:5). God has dealt with our sins. He laid them on Jesus. Jesus bore them in his own body on the cross. God made his Son to be a guilt offering for us. That means he took the guilt of all the wrong

things we've said, thought and done off of us and removed it with the cross. You and I are washed clean of sin and guilt by the blood of Jesus.

3. SELF-PITY – Some fall into the “woe-is-me” syndrome. “Nobody cares, so why should I. Nobody cares if I live or die.” This kind of thinking often leads to bitterness and resentment. Feelings of loneliness sweep over them. God wants us to take our eyes off of ourselves and think of someone worse off than we are, someone we can encourage, bless and help. I once had a retired pastor with a severe case of Parkinson's disease. It affected his speaking, which affected his thinking. He felt worthless and started to feel sorry for himself. I reminded him that as long as he was alive, God had a purpose for him. He still had children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren who needed his prayers, his words of encouragement and his faith passed on to them, even if it can typewritten. As long as we live and breathe our lives will always have purpose. There will always be someone we can help and minister to. And as long as we are serving there will be no time for self-pity. We have a member who is 93. She has been in and out of the hospital and recovered in a nursing home for a while with a broken hip. But she's back home. Everyday she is on the phone to her younger friends listening to them and giving them words of encouragement. She still sends out cards to lift people's spirits even she herself doesn't see very well. She doesn't talk much about her woes, just all the people she stays in touch with. She inspires me.
4. FEAR – A fourth negative attitude that drains a lot of people is fear. Feelings of fear often increase with age. As we age we find ourselves afraid of things that never used to bother us, like driving at night. Fear, when it takes hold of a person, tends to freeze or immobilize that person. It keeps them from doing things and makes them ineffective and unproductive. One of people's greatest fears is the fear of death especially as you draw closer to the end of your earthly life. Isn't it wonderful to know that since we, God's children, have flesh and blood, Jesus, too, shared in our humanity [became human like us], so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil; and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death (He 2:14-15). We have been set free! Christ faced and went through death for us. And when he rose from the dead, he conquered death for us. That means because he lives, we, too, shall live forever with him in heaven. We have absolutely nothing to fear. David knew that not only did God rescue him from his sins, but God also “*delivered me from all my fears*” (Ps 34:4).

After years of war and conquest, the children of Israel had taken control of the promised land. It had been over five years since the fall of Jericho. And even though there will still pockets of the enemy here and there, the time had come to divide the land up between the 12 tribes of Israel. 2 ½ tribes already had been given land east of the Jordan River. Now the rest had come before Joshua for their share in the inheritance. The areas were to be assigned by lot.

That's when Caleb approached Joshua and reminded him of what the Lord had promised over 45 years ago. God said through his servant Moses that the land on which Caleb set his feet would be his inheritance and that of his children, because Caleb trusted

the Word of the Lord and followed the Lord wholeheartedly. Caleb reminded Joshua how both of them had been sent out by Moses along with 10 other spies to explore the promised land 45 years earlier. All 12 spies agreed: it was a rich land, a land just like the Lord had said, flowing with milk and honey. All 12 also agreed on the conditions they would find there: large fortified cities and giants (that's what the Anakites were). But where the 12 disagreed was 10 of the 12 saw only danger and obstacles; 2 of the 12, Caleb and Joshua, saw only endless opportunity. The 10 measured themselves against the giants and saw themselves as "grasshoppers." The 2, Caleb and Joshua, measured the giants against God, and saw themselves as giant slayers.

When the 10 gave their report focusing on the negative, they "*made the people's hearts melt with fear.*" Growing pessimism swept through the camp of the Israelites based on the majority report. Amidst rampant lack of faith Caleb and Joshua issued a minority report. With boldness and confidence in the Lord, they stood before the people and challenged them, "*We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it*" (Nu 13:30). "*If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them*" (Nu 14:8-9). The people believed the report of the 10 over Caleb and Joshua and nearly stoned them to death.

Now, let me ask you a question. Can you name even one of the 10 spies? If you can, you are spending way too much time on Bible Trivia. People like that, who go with the flow, fade into nothing. Most of the heroes of the Bible are people who stood against the politically correct thinking of their day and chose to forge on ahead, trusting the Lord, no matter what others thought.

Caleb had faith in the power of God. He trusted the promises God had made. He was not naïve about what they faced. He knew there were giants and fortified cities looming ahead of them. He didn't minimize the problems they faced. Instead he magnified God.

And Caleb did that in the face of all kinds of obstacles and opposition. First, he faced the opposition of his friends. He called the other 10 spies who issued the negative majority report "*my brothers.*" He had spent over 6 months traveling with them throughout the promised land. He couldn't believe they would turn on him. Sometimes the greatest opposition we face to our walk with God may come from those closest to us.

The second obstacle Caleb had against him was his race. This might surprise you, but Caleb wasn't a Jew. His father was Jepphuneh the Kenizzite, a descendant of Esau. Caleb was a Gentile, on the outside looking in. He had been adopted into the Israelite family. And yet, Caleb was loyal to the God of Israel, putting his trust in the Lord and wholeheartedly following him despite the fact that he hadn't been born into God's family.

Even Caleb's name was against him. Caleb means "dog" and dogs were considered to be unclean by Jews and beneath their contempt.

The last thing Caleb had going against him was his age. At age 85 Caleb was no spring chicken, but he didn't use that as an excuse or let that stop him from obeying God and finishing what he had started some 45 years earlier.

Caleb had a firm, unwavering faith in the God who had adopted him into his family. We share at least one thing in common with Caleb. We, too, were at one time on the outside of God's family looking in. We weren't born into the family of God. We were born sinners, natural enemies of God. We needed to be born again into the family of God. That happened for most of us at our baptism where God washed us of our sins, put his Holy Spirit into our heart, gave us the gift of faith and made us his adopted children through faith in Jesus, and thus members of his family of believers. That is exactly what Paul wrote in Eph 2:12-13, 19, *"remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in this world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household."* This dramatic change in our status with God happened because Jesus shed his blood and laid down his life for us on the cross.

I just love Caleb's attitude, don't you? He exemplifies the attitude that says: "Since each day is a gift from God, I choose to live each one enthusiastically for him." He definitely has a different spirit. God saw that spirit in Caleb and rewarded his positive attitude of faith, *"But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it"* (Num 14:24). God is looking for that kind of heart, that kind of spirit, that kind of attitude in us, my friends. And like the verse we heard read to us earlier (2 Chron 16:9) God is waiting to strengthen and bless the hearts of those who wholeheartedly trust in him, *"For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him."*

Caleb's faith was in his Savior God, his mighty Deliverer. Caleb had personally witnessed the mighty acts God performed to set his people free from slavery in Egypt. He saw God inflict the Egyptians with plague after plague, sent to convince Pharaoh to let God's people go free. Caleb was there when God parted the Red Sea and allowing his people to walk across on dry ground. Later he saw God use that sea to swallow up and drown Pharaoh's army. Caleb had seen God feed over 2 million people with manna every morning and with quail and water that miraculously came out of rocks. He witnessed God crumble the walls of Jericho into dust before their very eyes and cause the sun to stand still for nearly 24 hours while pursued their enemies in supernatural daylight. He knew what God could do on behalf of his children.

And you and I have witnessed even greater acts of deliverance from our Savior, Jesus. What a mighty deliverer we have! Jesus took on Satan headfirst and crushed him into defeat on the cross. Jesus took on sin bearing the weight of the world's sin in his body on

the cross. He endured the cross, bore the shame, carried the guilt, and suffered the punishment that was all ours. He did all that to set us free in this life and eternally.

## **AGE IS NO OBSTACLE**

The most amazing thing about Caleb is his attitude toward living life and aging. Listen to him again, *So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; "I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. Now give me this hill country...let me at those giants!"* That's the way to live – live life strong all the way to the end. No whining about aches and pains. No moaning and complaining about what you can't do. Just a "can-do" attitude with eyes firmly fixed on God. Age is no obstacle or barrier to performance.

I personally believe that we should think of how we can make our last years be our most productive years. Our culture and society has it all wrong. Life does not go downhill after retirement. In fact history teaches us the opposite. Did you know that our world's greatest achievements, inventions and discoveries were all made by people older than age 65? It's true. For example, Grandma Moses didn't start painting until she was in her 70's. Verdi wrote Othello at age 74 and Falstaff at age 80. The grand artist Titian painted his famous, Battle of La Panto, at age 98. Most of Thomas Edison's greatest inventions and accomplishments were in his 60's through his 80's. Benjamin Franklin was an elder statesman when he helped shape the founding of our nation. Winston Churchill led England through its darkest days during WWII while he was in his 70's, as did General Douglas MacArthur with our armed forces. And Ronald Reagan skillfully orchestrated the downfall of the Soviet Union as President of the United States while he was in his 70's. So you can't tell me that your best years are behind you. Your best accomplishments still lie ahead. Bring on the mountains! Let us at the giants!

Dr. Paul Brand, a well-known Christian author and counselor wrote about his mother. He grew up in India where his parents were missionaries. After his father's death, his mother continued to from town to town and village to village, hut to hut telling the people of India about Jesus. One day, at age 73, she fell and broke her hip. She was far from competent medical help, so one of the villagers placed her in the back of cart and carted her over heavily rutted roads. The journey was so bone jarring that her hip was injured beyond repair. She would only walk with a severe limp aided by a crutch for the rest of her life. It was at that point that Dr. Brand suggested to his mother that maybe she should retire. Her reply was charged with passion, "Retire? And do what? Of what value is that? Live out the few remaining years of your life doing nothing for God? Of what value is that!?" She continued to travel from village to village and hut to hut sharing Jesus until age 93 when she could no longer ride a donkey. And even then she had villagers carry her so she could talk to others of Jesus until she died at age 95. She knew how to live life large for God right up to her last breath.

I know some of you are thinking, "I have too many physical weaknesses right now to do anything for God. I'm confined to a wheelchair or a nursing home bed. I can't walk. I can't see very well. I can't hear. What can I do? I once served a retired pastor who was

confined to a nursing home and suffered from a severe disease that affected his walking and his speech. He once voiced the same complaints to me. I told him that as long as he had his mind and as long as he had life he had a purpose for living. He had children and grandchildren and even great-grandchildren who needed his prayers. He started slowly typing them letters passing on his faith. He even wrote sermons that could be shared with other residents in his nursing home. He caught it. He understood that as long as we are alive, God has a purpose for us being here on earth. We are here to bless others and to help lead them to Christ. We have to stop focusing inward on ourselves, and what we think we can't do. We need to start focusing our attention outward on the needs of others and find ways to bless them and help them.

Would you like to know the secret to Caleb's success and others like him? He served the Lord "wholeheartedly" all the days of his life. The word "wholehearted" literally means to "close the gap." It is a term hunters used when they closed the gap between them and their prey. Caleb continually "closed the gap" between him and God. He never let a gap develop in his relationship with God. Caleb was blessed as a result and that blessing was passed onto his descendants because "*he followed the Lord, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.*" Wouldn't you like to be blessed like that? Wouldn't you like to pass that blessing on to your heirs, leaving them a legacy of solid faith in Christ? Then we need to learn how to "close the gap" with God. We need to stay close to him at all times and follow him wholeheartedly all the days of our life. Weekly worship helps. Going to Communion helps. Reading your Bible daily helps. Daily devotions, prayer, meditation. They all help us "close the gap" with God. And putting into practice what we learn from God's Word, not just hearing it and reading it, but doing what it says – that makes the difference. That is how we learn to follow God wholeheartedly all the days of our life.

And when we do, we will see life differently. We will have a different spirit within us. We will have an attitude like Caleb's. We won't see mountains and giants or age as formidable obstacles. We will view them as opportunities for God's power to work in us. We will stand firm on the promises of God's Word. Trusting in our mighty Deliverer Jesus we will find ourselves saying right up to the very end of our lives, "Let me at those mountains! Bring on those giants!" Amen.

What is your attitude toward living life? Toward aging?

What qualities did you find in Caleb that are worth pursuing in your life?

What changes in attitude and faith do you need to make?

What people has God placed in your life that you can help serve and bless?

What are your mountains and giants?

How has God delivered you in the past?