

**Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**September 30, 2018**  
**Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church**  
**Farmington, NM**

**Numbers 11:16,24-29** The Lord said to Moses: “Bring me seventy of Israel’s elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the tent of meeting, that they may stand there with you.

24 So Moses went out and told the people what the Lord had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the tent. 25 Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied—but did not do so again. 26 However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. 27 A young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”

28 Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses’ aide since youth, spoke up and said, “Moses, my lord, stop them!”

29 But Moses replied, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!”

**“Put the Spirit in the Proper Place”**

Sometimes the Bible makes us a little uncomfortable. Certain episodes recorded in the Bible make us scratch our heads. We read what God is doing and wonder what his motivation is, what message he means to give, what signal he is attempting to send. His judgment comes swift and uncompromising. He lets people get away disobedience. He flexes his muscles in powerful deliverance, then displays excessive patience. He sends generous gifts to undeserving whiners and then withdraws his blessings because one minor detail gets overlooked.

A tour through the Bible sometimes feels like we are visitors in someone else’s home. We walk in and everything is pristine and immaculately clean so we feel afraid to step into any space for fear of contaminating it. We arrive into someone else’s home who prefers to let their environment look lived in and we are afraid to take a step for fear of turning an ankle. You walk into your boss’ office to leave a memo but realize she will notice if one binder gets brushed, one plaque or nicknack is disturbed. But then you get invited into her supervisors office and when asked to sit down you wonder if it’s ok to move the stacks of paper piled up on every surface of the office. Everything is out in the open because that’s the filing system that makes sense, but you have no idea how it works. In other words, everything is where it is supposed to be, but you don’t understand how it fits together.

And that can be the challenge when we wrestle with certain segments of Scripture like Numbers chapter 11. God knows how it all fits together. He wants to piece it together for us. God gives his Spirit to his people. He wants them to have his Spirit to serve him for his ultimate purposes. He knows we don’t always understand how and why. But God wants to

give us his Spirit to give us a dose of humility. And then we will see that God wants to us you and all his people to serve his ultimate purposes. When we see that, we will realize God puts his Spirit in the proper place.

Today we are only focusing on a few select verses from Numbers chapter 11 so we don't head in a bunch of different directions. But it helps to see that the chapter opens with the people of God complaining about all **"their hardships."** (Numbers 11:1) We see that it is the "rabble" among the Israelites who are voicing their displeasure against God most openly. And here is the biggest slap in the face to God. After he led them out of Egypt and miraculously delivered them from Pharaoh's army, after keeping them safe in the wilderness and providing food to sustain this nation purely by his power, they have the nerve to complain about the menu. They whine: **"If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"** (Numbers 11:4-6) It's such an insult to God to say that they were actually better off back in slavery in Egypt because they had a better selection of groceries. This isn't the kind of spirit God looks for from his people.

So we can understand why Moses would get frustrated. The people are complaining. God is getting angry. Moses is caught in the middle. Moses lets it all out. I can't do this. Remember God, I never signed up for this. I didn't want this gig in the first place. He gets so fed up that he says: **"I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me."** (Numbers 11:14,15)

It's easy to take things personally when they don't go the right way. We all share the natural inward focus of Moses that looks at how bad things are for us. How many people have you talked to who said, 'I've just been so busy lately.' Or, 'You wouldn't believe the week I just had.' Even, 'Things are just so crazy right now at home.' After a while you start to realize everyone is busy, everyone's life is chaotic. I was talking to someone getting ready to go on vacation. They were listing off how rough their life was, all the things they had to prepare, everything they had to get ready, all the extra work it was causing. I had to bite my tongue so I didn't tell them what a burden it must be to leave town for a fabulous destination of relaxation. But we all do it. We suffer from the spirit of first focusing on how everything going on around us affects us.

And yet God gives Moses a very practical solution. Moses is feeling a terrible burden all alone. So God says: **"Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the tent of meeting, that they may stand there with you."** (Numbers 11:16) Then God uses those 70 elders to lessen the burden for Moses: **"Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied."** (Numbers 11:25) God put his Spirit in the proper place when he gives his gifts to fellow believers. God enables those elders to speak and act and serve him.

God wants to put his Spirit on all of us who take things so personally. He wants to open our eyes to see how he gifts his people. So let's celebrate God's gifts to his people. Let's celebrate the leaders in our congregation who are given God's Spirit to serve, to give their own time for the good of our congregation. Let's celebrate the people who volunteer all over behind the scenes to keep our ministry functioning, caring for the facilities we've been blessed with, who work to maintain what we've been given. Let's celebrate the generous donors who give their first and their best to God's work among us, who take funds that could be used for a new car payment and give it over to God joyfully and eagerly. Let's celebrate the people who care for their brothers and sisters in the faith, making phone calls or sending text messages to people they haven't seen in a while inviting them to church and Bible study, who reach out to the hurting souls among us, who show compassion to those in the hospital or homebound.

God has put his Spirit on a variety of his people to use their gifts in a variety of ways. Praise God for his goodness!

And yet, here's where the challenging part of this episode comes in. The Lord told Moses to have those 70 elders meet him at the tent of meeting. But for whatever reason, two of those elders didn't carry through on the instructions. We get this red flag: **"However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp."** (Numbers 11:26) People notice. They bring it to the attention of Moses. Something must be done. Joshua pipes up: **"Moses, my lord, stop them!"** (Numbers 11:28)

I can't but side with Joshua. At least initially. Joshua is someone I can relate to. He is trying to do the right thing. He knows the type of people he's dealing with. He has been putting up with these people right alongside Moses for all these years. He knows they tend to grumble and complain even about the good things they get from God. He knows they have a track record of straying from God and doing their own thing. He knows they aren't reliable to do everything God says the way God says it.

We share Joshua's suspicion of what God's people are up to. It's just a natural impulse we find inside of ourselves. There isn't always a right or wrong to every situation. But we understand there is a good way and a better way. And sometimes we turn our way into the right way.

Some of us are ready to turn off the news because of the way one story dominates coverage all day every day. But the allegations surrounding the most recent Supreme Court nomination shows us some uncomfortable truths. Without getting into the details, we can see people react in very predictable ways. If you were already in favor of the nominee, you probably see these allegations as a smear campaign. If you didn't want him to get approved, you probably see these allegations as proof he was never fit for that high office in the first place. And yet, in humility it would pay for all of us to take a step backward. We get caught in this uncomfortable position of presuming a person's innocent until proven guilty and realizing the church as often been tone deaf to the hurt and suffering of people who have

been victims of abuse. Before I make up my mind about an issue purely on the basis of my political affiliation, how is God calling me to see this issue as a Christian?

It's the same approach we all need to take when we find ourselves quick to find fault like Joshua. Moses has to snap him out of his natural reaction: **"Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!"** (Numbers 11:29) Moses recognizes the strong emotions pouring out of his trusted advisor. Those strong emotions can turn into jealousy when we want to guard something for ourselves. Those emotions can boil over into envy when we see someone else with something we want. It's the same problem the disciples suffer from in Mark chapter 9.

Moses wants us to put the Spirit in the proper place. To do that God needs to give us a spirit of humility. The Spirit needs to die us a better perspective on our own place in God's kingdom. God's Spirit works to redirect our zeal for God's work.

For the times when I'm a lot like Peter, trying to prevent Jesus from suffering and dying, Jesus wouldn't be stopped. For the times my emotions well up in me so I react like Peter cutting off an ear in an effort to defend Jesus, He won't be stopped. For the times when I tend to be like the disciples trying to stop miracles, Jesus won't be stopped. For the impulses to silence prophets, Jesus won't be stopped. Jesus had God's Spirit. The Spirit kept Jesus in the proper place: **"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners."** (Isaiah 61:1) Jesus wouldn't be stopped in his work to serve you.

Moses recognized that God's words aren't for a select few, but for everyone. An influential preacher from a century ago put it this way: "There is no need to defend a lion — you simply let it out and it will defend itself." (Charles Spurgeon) God gives us his Spirit to help combat the impulse we feel to protect God's order, God's honor, God's ways. Instead, filled with the Spirit, we simply turn God's word loose and let it do its work.

Satan wants to silence God's people. God wants to use your various gifts for his ultimate purposes. One early Church Father helps us see that giving the Spirit to others didn't reduce the Spirit given to Moses: "just as a person who kindles a thousand flames from one, does not lessen the first, while he communicates light to the others, so God did not diminish the grace imparted to Moses by the fact that he communicated of it to the seventy" (Theodoret). God's Spirit to God's people today gives us more than 70 elders. We have our Eldads and Medads who have God's Spirit in usual ways. And God uses us all. God uses you to share his word of forgiveness with a soul broken by sin. God uses your hug, your arm around a brother or sister who is suffering to offer his encouragement and support. God uses your kind words and witness to bring hope to the hurting. God uses your humbly mumbled prayers to bring peace to this tortured world. He does that when he puts his Spirit in you. He comes to you to put his Spirit in the proper place. Amen.

*+ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. +*