

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost – October 7, 2012
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Numbers 11:16, 24-29 (NIV84)

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.

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 of the Spirit that was on him and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they 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!"**

Fellow servants of our Lord,

The citizens are restless. They are getting more and more concerned about the status quo. They are less and less pleased with the way things are going in their lives. They are longing for life to be the way it was in times past – back in the good ol' days. They are grumbling and complaining to their leaders. But it's not 2012 – it's actually sometime in the 1400's BC at the time of Moses. The complainers were the nation of Israel – some 600,000 men strong who together with their families had grown tired and weary of the provisions the Lord had graciously given them and were wailing for something else.

"If only we had meat to eat! 5) We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost--also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. 6) But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!" (Numbers 11:4-6 NIV84)

Their complaints and wailing had become an irritation to the Moses and to the Lord. **Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. 11) He asked the LORD, "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me?"** (Numbers 11:10-11 NIV84)

The complaining of the people had made Moses miserable. And now he voices some of his own complaints. Listen to his words to the Lord, **"I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. 15 If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now--if I have found favor in your eyes--and do not let me face my own ruin."** (Numbers 11:14-15 NIV84)

"Whine, whine, whine, complain, complain, complain, is that all you can do?" the irritated parent asks the discontented child. That's how you and I would have responded to Moses and the complaints of his people. But that's not how our heavenly Father responded. His response included a measure of loving discipline which would ultimately be a blessing for his children.

The Lord would provide assistance to Moses so he would not have to bear the burden of the people by himself. The Lord would provide meat for those who grumbled as he explained to Moses.

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. 17) I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone. 18) "Tell the people: 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The LORD heard you when you wailed, "If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!" Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will eat it. 19) You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, 20) but for a whole month--until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it--because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?"'" (Numbers 11:16-20 NIV84)

And what was Moses response? Disbelief, a failure to take the Lord at his promise, more grumbling and complaining. **But Moses said, "Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, 'I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!' 22) Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?" 23) The LORD answered Moses, "Is the Lord's arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you." (Numbers 11:21-23 NIV84)**

Our text for today focuses our attention on the fact that the Lord poured out his Spirit on the 70 elders (leaders and officials of Israel) as a blessing to Moses and the people. We've just spend the last couple of minutes putting this text into the proper perspective. The outpouring of the Spirit was God's response to the grumbings and complaints of his people and their leader Moses.

Theme: The Lord Blesses His People with His Spirit

1. Let us set aside personal ambition
2. Let us seek God's honor

The fact of the matter is that it's relatively easy for us to relate to the situation surrounding the events of our text. We've done our fair share of grumbling and complaining against the Lord and his appointed leaders in the government, the church and the home. We've tested his patience and the patience of those whom he has placed over us to be a blessing to us. When it comes to honoring the Lord by honoring those he has placed over us – well let's just say we've broken the 4th commandment which requires obedience to parents and superiors over and over again. Our own personal ambition has often placed us at odds with the Lord.

But the Lord has non-the-less blessed us by providing Spirit filled leaders for us in our church and in our homes. Christian parents often hear the same kind of grumbling that Moses heard – there's nothing to eat. Christian parents often are dishonored and disrespected by grumbling and complaining children. Christian parents often feel the frustration that Moses felt.

But before we get ourselves all worked up into a tizzy – let's stop and think of how the Lord has blessed us with his Spirit. It is only because of the work of the Holy Spirit that we are Christians. If it were not for the fact that the Holy Spirit worked through the Gospel to call us to faith in Christ Jesus – our Lord and Savior we would not be a part of the family of God. We would be lost in our sins and left without anywhere to turn.

By the work of the Holy Spirit we are God's children and we can turn to him with our troubles and concerns just as Moses did in our text. And just as the Lord responded to Moses so he responds to us. In response to Moses complaint that the burden was too heavy, that the task was too great – God provided a support network of 70 elders whom he would fill with the same Spirit as Moses.

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 of the Spirit that was on him and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again.

At this point in time God provided his people with a visible reminder of his gracious presence among them with a special cloud. It had been obvious to the people that the Lord had been with Moses and had equipped and empowered Moses as their leader. Now the Lord would make it obvious that he would also be the 70 elders as he commissioned them to serve him and his people.

Many times we use a flame to represent the Holy Spirit and his work because the Spirit made his presence known on Pentecost Sunday with tongues of fire that danced on the apostles heads as they proclaimed the wonderful message of salvation through faith in Jesus who was crucified on the cross for the sins of the world and who rose from the dead on the third day to assure the world of his victory over sin.

We can also use a flame to help us understand what happened in our text for today. When a candle is burning we can hold another candle to it to light its wick so that it also can produce light and heat. The first candle continues to produce heat and light. When the Lord took the Spirit that was on Moses and put it on the 70 elders, Moses abilities to serve the Lord were not lessened. He was able to serve in the same way he had before but now there were 70 others equipped to serve with the Spirit and power of God. These men would function in harmony with Moses to give honor the Lord.

The 70 men showed that they had been given the same Spirit as Moses by prophesying in a unique fashion. Our text implies that this was a once and done occurrence intended to serve the purpose of showing God's approval of their selection as assistants to Moses.

The Lord had graciously poured out his Spirit on 70 elders to provide a support network for Moses and to provide his blessings to his people in response to grumbles and complaints which Moses and the people leveled against him. And just as the Lord responded to Moses so he responds to us. We don't have to go it alone when it comes to training our children in the truths of God's Word. We don't have to stand alone as we seek to honor God through the work of our congregation. The Lord has provided a Spirit-filled support network for us!

When the Holy Spirit called us to faith he also brought us into fellowship with other Spirit-filled individuals. As members of a Christian congregation we are able to support each other in giving honor to the Lord. One of the ways that we provide assistance to Christian parents is through our Christian Education programs. Fellow Christians serving as teachers assist parents in re-enforcing the truths of Scripture which parents seek to share and model in their homes provide a support network to train up our children to give honor to their Lord and Savior. What a blessing it is when we set aside our personal ambitions to work together in this way.

There are many opportunities for us to work together as members of a Christian congregation to give honor to the Lord but sadly selfish ambition often hinders that work. Instead of working together as a unit to give honor to the Lord we let our own selfish desires take precedence. God is not honored when that takes place as we see from the example in our text.

There were two men who had been selected to serve in the group of 70 elders, named Eldad and Medad who for some reason were not at the tent of meeting with the rest of the group. They were in the camp with the rest of the people. **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!"

The news that Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the camp was seen by Joshua as an attempt to challenge the authority of Moses. Joshua in an effort to safeguard Moses position and authority tells Moses to put a stop to their actions. His actions were similar to the actions of Jesus' disciples in our Gospel lesson for today who complained to Jesus that there were people casting our demons in his name even though they weren't numbered among the 12. Just as Jesus scolded the 12 so Moses scolded Joshua.

"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!"

Moses would not let selfish ambition stand in the way of the Lord's work. He was zealous for that work and he wanted Joshua to share that same zeal for the Lord that he had shown for him.

Humility before the Lord can replace selfish ambition in the hearts of the Lord's servants. We note that humility in John the Baptist who was willing to step back so that Jesus could increase. We note it in Paul who described himself as the least of the Lord's apostles who was willing to do what he could so that some might be saved. And that humility is also evident in the lives of many today who gladly and willingly serve with the gifts the Lord has given to them as they seek only to honor the Lord.

That was Moses' concern too. He was not concerned about his own position, rank or honor. Rather it was his desire that **"all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them."** Moses understood that if this were the case that great blessings would result and God's glory would increase.

My dear friends the Lord has poured out his Spirit on all those who are part of his church. He fills us with faith and leads us to appreciate his wonderful acts of grace and love. He changes our selfish sinful hearts into hearts which desire to love and serve him. When our sinful selfish ambition rears its ugly head in our lives he uses his Word to remind us to set it aside and seek his honor. Praise the Lord! He pours out his Spirit on us through his Word and blesses us! Let us set aside personal ambition and let us seek God's honor. Amen.