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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
October 3, 2021
19th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: James 4:7-12, Mark 9:38-50

Hymns: 236; 482; 485; 50:2

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Numbers 11: 16, 24-29

So the LORD said to Moses: "Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. ... So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord, and he gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tabernacle. ²⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that *was* upon him, and placed *the same* upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again.

²⁶ But two men had remained in the camp: the name of one *was* Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them. Now they *were* among those listed, but who had not gone out to the tabernacle; yet they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷ And a young man ran and told Moses, and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."

²⁸ So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, *one* of his choice men, answered and said, "Moses my lord, forbid them!"

²⁹ Then Moses said to him, "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD's people were prophets *and* that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!" (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Moses overwhelmed.

Yes, the Lord called Moses and the Lord sent Moses to deliver the Children of Israel from the bondage of cruel slavery in Egypt. By the Lord's power the people had been delivered from slavery, and were led by the sign of God, a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night. They knew the Lord's presence was there with them. However, there were a great many people, and where there are people there will be problems, a great many problems. There was more to do than Moses could handle. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, advised Moses to find wise and honest men from each of the tribes of Israel to help judge and decide problems between people. Moses followed this advice, but it appears that it didn't help, at least not to the degree that it ought to have helped. In our text we again find Moses overwhelmed with the responsibilities that fell on his shoulders.

The Lord's response to Moses' plight was for the Lord to establish the ministry of the elders of Israel who would assist Moses in his responsibilities. From this inspired account we are presented with valuable lessons about --

THEME: Serving in Public Ministry.

The first lesson is perhaps most obvious, the need for --

I. Involving More in Called Service.

The Lord instructed Moses to gather seventy elders of Israel, those who were known to be elders, those who were respected and already accepted by the people. Moses had gone through this process at the advice his father-in-law. These people were already in the position of elders among the people.

If they had already been in position to serve as judges, why was so much still falling on Moses? What was missing? For some reason

the arrangement wasn't working. It just wasn't functional. We are not told if it was a matter of these elders not exercising the authority entrusted to them, or that their authority wasn't recognized by the people. It could have been either one, and it would have caused the plan to fail. It could very easily have been a combination of both. Or it could have been that Moses failed to entrust the elders with the work they were chosen to carry out. He simply continued to do it himself, as people seemed to naturally look to him, or desired his personal attention for their particular issue. It all became too much for Moses to handle. It was too much for Moses to do a good and proper job in leading the people of Israel. It resulted in Moses losing his composure, not only with the people, but also with the Lord.

This is a snapshot of human nature. On the one hand individuals take on more than they should, and that doesn't work very well, and on the other hand people are inclined to just let the one who is doing things do more. Oh yeah, this is one of those "and then on the third hand" people are inclined to go to the one, and not go to the others who have been entrusted with responsibility of serving them in their time of need. That's what was happening with Israel, and it didn't work very well. The Lord had a better plan. He called on Moses to gather those selected recognized elders to the tabernacle for the Lord's blessing.

This can play out the same way in the church today. Pastors can feel overwhelmed, and yet are reluctant to let go of anything to trust others to do what they have gotten used to doing. Others get in the habit of looking to the pastor for things that need not involve the pastor at all. Still others like to come to the pastor because they think he's the one in charge. The result can be a frustrated pastor, and a frustrated congregation, and things not being handled as well as they ought to be handled, both spiritual things and temporal, physical things.

Of course, the Lord has a better way. We read in Paul's letter to Titus: *"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you."* (Titus 1:5) It is the Lord's desire that: *"all things be done decently and in order."* (1 Corinthians 14:40) And, of course, the Lord's exhortation to Moses regarding the quality of

people selected remains the same, perhaps is even spiritually enhanced. *“Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, ⁹holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. ¹⁰But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.”* (1 Timothy 3:8-10)

This forms the model of a Christian congregation as we know it ought to be. Individuals are chosen according to the Lord’s specifications and are chosen to serve in different capacities for which the Lord has equipped them. Some minister to the congregation in areas of teaching the children, others in providing music for the worship service, others in maintaining property. Still others in providing leadership alongside the pastor. Others have been gifted with temporal blessings that they might financially support the work of the church, and give generously to help those in need, especially those who are of the household of God. It is this diversity of gifts that supports the Lord’s kingdom work. It is important to recognize that the Lord doesn’t look to one or two or even a few to do all that needs to be done. He provides the gifts and the opportunities to use the gifts given to His glory and the advancement of His kingdom. We need to recognize those gifts in ourselves, and then, *“Serve the Lord with gladness.”* (Psalm 100:2)

But as it was with Moses so it can be yet today. Sometimes it seems to break down and fail to function as well as it might. One might ask, “What’s missing?” It can be simply not --

II. Knowing the Spirit’s Blessing.

The Spirit’s blessing upon the elders of Israel is really the highlight of our text. Once they were all assembled at the tabernacle something special happened. *“Then the Lord came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again.”* (Numbers 11:25)

There is no doubt that Moses had received a special measure of the Holy Spirit to be the Lord’s prophet to lead the children of Israel to the Promised Land. So, the Lord took of the Spirit that was upon

Moses and placed that Spirit on the seventy elders of Israel. The Spirit's blessing was what was needed for these seventy elders of Israel to be endowed with the zeal, and with the necessary gifts for them to help lead and judge Israel. The sign of the Spirit was given that all should know that these were now chosen and blessed **by the Lord** to serve as elders of Israel. Their authority not only came from the people selecting them, or Moses inducting them, but from the Lord who **called** them to serve His people, and blessed them with gifts and power from above.

On that one occasion they prophesied, they spoke words given to them from the Spirit, that all might witness that they had been so chosen and blessed by the Spirit of God for the good work they were to do among the people of God.

So it is yet today. Later this month we will have elections to call men to serve as council men, elders or deacons to serve in special capacities. It would be easy for us to see this as congregation members picking other people who might be willing to serve. However, we recognize that something more is going on. We will want to remember that the Lord is the One who gives gifts to His people to serve in appropriate capacities for the good of God's people.

It is for the advancement of the gospel among us, and the advancement of God's kingdom in this world. That's important stuff! We recognize many different things as being important in life, but this is more important! We rely upon gifts and blessings coming from the Lord that these spiritual gifts and blessings might be received as such by us all.

Sometimes things stay very informal among us as people begin to serve the Lord. Other times we have installations rites where we call upon the Lord for His blessing upon those individual's serving as elders or teachers, or pastors. Sometimes we have visiting pastors laying on hands with a fitting Scripture passage to remind us that all public ministry comes to the church from the Lord and is granted any and all success by His power and blessing.

In our text we are told of a couple of men who for whatever reason neglected to obey the summons to appear before Moses at the

tabernacle. However, it was not so easy to dodge the Lord's call to ministry. They too prophesied out in the camp where they had remained. The power and blessing of the Lord, and the gift of the Spirit came upon them. They were called to serve, and so they were to serve.

That is important for us to note for us as well. Too often people have been given gifts to serve the Lord who redeemed them from sin and death, and yet they might think it's okay to choose not to serve the Lord with their lives. The Lord gives gifts, and the Lord has redeemed us from sin and death, and the Lord calls to service. His call ought not to be neglected. It is the Lord who has prepared individuals for service, and the Lord then presents opportunities to serve. The Lord calls upon us to step up and serve the Lord and His people that we might glorify our God and Savior in our lives.

It is important because it is all about --

III. Advancing the Gospel Message.

Moses' primary responsibility was to receive God's Word directly from the Lord, and then faithfully convey that message to God's people, first to the Children of Israel, and then by inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the first five books of the Bible to all of God's people to end of the world. He was a prophet of God unlike any other until the Lord Jesus, God incarnate appeared on this earth.

Then "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*" (John 1:14) The message that the Lord has entrusted to the Church, and the mission that has come to us as God's people in this congregation is wondrous beyond our comprehension. We spread this gospel for the salvation of souls.

So, we need to keep our focus that we each do better at what the Lord would have us do, that the work of the Kingdom be done faithfully among us, and God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Paul impressed this responsibility on Timothy, but the record stands for us as well. He wrote: "*I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom:* ² **Preach the**

word! *Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”* (2 Timothy 4:1-2)

The message of God’s Word needs to be presented clearly and correctly because this gospel of Christ crucified is the only way to life everlasting.

Again Paul charged Pastor Titus: *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”* (Titus 2:11-14)

God has given us the public ministry that we might better encourage one another in our faith and in our Christian lives. The gospel of a crucified and risen Savior comforts us with the grace of sins forgiven. It brings new life to our souls that we might turn away from the ways of the world and the expectations of the world and look for those things which are eternal. We encourage one another as we watch for Jesus’ glorious return.

As a congregation we rejoice together in the salvation that we have in Christ Jesus. As a congregation our function is to encourage one another in love and good works, and in avoiding the ensnarement of the world’s lusts and evil desires. This is what the Lord would have us do, and to this end He calls different individuals to serve in a variety of capacities, and He has blessed us that we might serve one another for the advancement of the kingdom of God among us.

This is what the public ministry is about serving the Lord on behalf of and for the benefit of our Christian brothers and sisters. May the Lord so bless us in our public ministry.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.