

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

I Thank God for You

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 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!"

When I go through my pre-marital counseling sessions with couples, there are a few discussion questions along the way. The first question comes up right after we discuss what a wonderful gift from God a spouse is. The question goes like this: What leads couples all too easily to forget that their spouse is a special gift from God to cherish? The discussion usually leads to the truth that the stresses and strains of living together every day often leads couples to focus on the negative—to see the things about their spouse that annoy or anger them so that they forget that this person is a gift from God. I think that that phenomenon which occurs in marriage can also take place among fellow Christians in a congregation. All too quickly, we focus on the negatives we see in other people in the church and we lose sight of what a great gift we really have in each other. This morning as we see a similar situation take place among God's Old Testament people, we are reminded from Scriptures to thank God for each other and the different gifts he has given to each of us.

The Old Testament reading takes place shortly after the Israelites have set out from Sinai. You remember this as the place where they received the commandments from God. Now they were beginning what should have been the last stage of their journey towards the Promised Land. Sadly, instead of being filled with joy and anticipation as they headed towards Canaan, the people were full of grumbling and complaints. The specific complaint which serves as a background for our text had to do with food. The Lord had miraculously supplied the people with Manna from Heaven every day. Yet, this was not good enough. They longed to eat meat, like they used to back in their days of slavery. Their constant complaining was more than their leader, Moses, could bear. The Lord, in his mercy, provided for Moses. He told him he would give him helpers so that he didn't have to carry the burden all by himself. This is why the Lord says at the beginning of our text: "*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."

Moses did as the Lord commanded. He brought the elders to the Tent of Meeting. And our text continues *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.* For some reason, however, two of the elders did not make it to the meeting. They had remained in the camp. This did not stop the Lord from giving them the same outpouring of his Spirit which resulted in their prophesying in the camp. This might seem like a good thing. But it didn't seem so good to some of the Israelites. A young man ran up to Moses with the report of what had happened as though this were some type of scandal. Joshua, the future leader of the people, condemned Eldad and Medad, saying, "*Moses, my Lord, stop them!*" Why were people upset at Eldad and Medad? They jumped to the conclusion that Eldad and Medad were doing something wrong when really they were putting to use a gift from the Lord.

It's sad but this kind of misunderstanding is not uncommon among God's people. We are part of a congregation. That congregation is part of a Synod. That Synod is comprised of over 400,000 people. Simply put, no one person could lead them all. And so there are various people who help in carrying out the ministry of our synod. On the local level, these helpers gather in a congregation. This congregation is also too large for any one person to do all the work. So we need many people to do work. And they do. That's a great blessing. However, we don't always see it that way. Unfortunately, we sometimes can turn what is meant to be a blessing into a problem.

Our sinful nature doesn't want us to look at each other and be thankful. Our sinful nature wants us to be jealous of others. It wants us to find something wrong with the work they are doing. It wants us to look down on others and think that we could do much better than they are doing. Too often, we see that sinful nature win out among us. It happens on a big scale as we call into question the work that is being done by others in our synod without knowing all the facts. It can also happen within a congregation. The eighth commandment tells us to take other people's words and actions in the kindest possible way. But how many times don't we think the worst of what someone else says or does because it is not in line with our thinking on how something should be done? When Christians face persecution from the unbelieving world, this is a challenge to their faith. When Christians face persecution from members of their own church, this is a tool of the devil.

Each and every one of us needs to check our attitudes in how we look at each other and view the ministry that is being done here and elsewhere by our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Look at how Moses reacted when Joshua told him he needed to stop Eldad and Medad from prophesying. He exclaimed, "*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 was not upset at Eldad and Medad because they had missed the meeting. He was just happy that they were out there doing the work of the Lord. He saw in these men a gift from God and he was thankful for it. Moses knew that the Lord had given him Eldad and Medad as helpers, not ones who would hinder his ministry. And that is how he treated them.

When we are tempted to tear down someone else in the church, we need to once again remember just what it means to be members of the church. I'm not talking about having a mailbox or having your name listed in the church directory. Being a member of the church means that you profess a faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin. It means that you recognize your only hope for salvation is a gracious God who sent his one and only Son to die for you, as unworthy as you are. And when you look at another member in this congregation, recognize that they believe the same thing. They are also a sinner who would be completely lost were it not for their Savior, who died for them. He gives their life value just as he gives your life value. Because of Jesus, you are working together with all the people who sit in these chairs and all the people who share your faith around the world. It is a tremendous blessing to enjoy that fellowship.

And here is the amazing thing. Even though we share a common faith here at Cross of Glory, none of us shares the same abilities and talents. God has blessed us each in unique ways. And when someone else uses a gift that they have and it isn't one that you possess, this is not a reason to be jealous, this is a reason to thank God. It's a wonderful thing when his people use their varied gifts to work towards the same goal: spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. I think a phrase that we could use a lot more of in our lives is the one that I wrote as the sermon theme: I thank God for you. Whether or not we say it out loud, these words should be in our hearts every time we speak to a fellow Christian. Husbands and wives: think of how some of your conversations might change if you started by telling your spouse, "I thank God for you." Fellow members of Cross of Glory, as you work together for the sake of the gospel, don't forget to tell other members, "I thank God for you." All of those other members are gifts from God to his church.

This doesn't mean that there will never be honest, constructive criticism or loving admonition among us. It means that we must never lose sight of what has brought us together in the first place—a God who loved us so much he sent his only Son to die for us. As we work together to further his kingdom, let's always be thankful for the gifts he has given us in each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. **Amen.**

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