

Our second reading today comes from the Old Testament book of Numbers. In this portion of the scriptures, Moses is leading the Israelites out of slavery toward the Promised Land. But the journey is hard and the people are complaining. They are starting to reimagine their history that life was not so bad when they were slaves in Egypt.

Chapter 11 of the book of Numbers begins with the people telling Moses about what all they had back in Egypt. They tell Moses that they got to eat fresh fish for free. They had plenty of cucumbers, melons, onions, and garlic. But now they have none of that.

Instead all they get to eat is manna. A sticky resin that the people have to gather every morning to make cakes that I always imagine being like flour tortillas. Manna day in and day out. And the people are sick and tired of eating manna and they are letting Moses hear about it.

Moses decides that he has had enough so Moses complains to God. Moses asks God what he has done to deserve this. What has he done to have to be in charge of these people on this circuitous route through a desert? Moses tells God, "These people are asking for meat. Where am I going to get enough meat to feed these people?" The people are unhappy and Moses is unhappy.

So God tells Moses to choose 70 men among the group and invite them to meet together for instructions. The Israelites have been camping together but there is a special tent that was set apart where Moses goes to have conversations with God. So Moses chooses 70 men and they gather together at the tent of meeting, this special tent for divine revelation.

God reveals to Moses that these 70 will receive a portion of the Spirit that has been resting on Moses so that Moses does not have to bear all of the responsibility of leadership. And that is what happens.

**Read Numbers 11:24-30**

It seems that there were 2 guys who don't make it to the tent of meeting but the spirit of God still chooses to use them. These 2 men are still in the camp and they start to prophesy or give witness to what God is doing. A young man sees this and becomes very concerned. After all, God told Moses to bring the leadership to the tent of meeting and that is where God's Spirit would be shared.

This young man who witnesses what these two men are doing goes and tattles to Moses. But Moses does not seem overly concerned by these two men. Moses responds by saying that God is going to work through the hierarchy and that God is going to work through people outside of the hierarchy. God's Spirit is not going to be restrained by those that are officially chosen to be in positions of power. God's Spirit will not be constrained.

But we humans have a long history of trying to tame God's spirit. We become fearful of what the Holy Spirit is capable of doing so we try anything we can to bottle and control the spirit. And those of us in the organized church are probably the worst culprits of trying to manipulate what God's Holy Spirit is doing in the world.

I have been reading a book written by Lacy Ford. Some of you may know Lacy. He grew up in the Bethel community just up Hwy 274 here in York County where some of us live now. Lacy Ford is now Dr. Lacy Ford and he is the head of the history department at USC in Columbia. Dr. Ford has written a book about slavery here in the Deep South.

In the portion I just read he describes the white residents of Charleston and Edisto Beach in the 1820s being very concerned about African-Americans starting their own churches and learning to read the Bible for themselves. There was a lot of debate among white Charleston and Edisto Christians about whether or not it was wise for African-Americans to read the Bible for themselves without white teachers and preachers controlling the message.

And most of the white Charleston and Edisto Christians in the 1820s were concerned that if African-Americans started their own churches and read the Bible for themselves that they would not accept their lot of slaves.

In other words, these white Christians were concerned that God's Holy Spirit might do something that they could not control and that could destroy their way of life. And, in fact, these Christians were correct because it was through reading the Bible that African-Americans began to catch a glimpse of what freedom looks like.

Today is Pentecost when we read the story from Acts of the Holy Spirit breaking into the world in an unexpected way. Pentecost happens during a difficult time for followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus has been crucified, died, and was buried. His tomb was found empty by the women and then he appears again to his closest followers. Judas, the one who betrayed Jesus has been replaced by Matthias and there is uncertainty about what to do next.

And it is during this time of uncertainty that we read of the fresh winds of the spirit blowing in and creating something new and unexpected. This Spirit chooses to work through a diverse group of people who speak different languages but learn that through Christ they all share one thing in common.

The story from Numbers and the story from Acts about Pentecost teach us some very important lessons. 1. Don't try to tame God's Holy Spirit. God's Spirit will accomplish what God wants accomplished whether we work against it or not so we might as well be open to God using us in a fresh and new way.

2. God's Spirit works outside of the hierarchy. Eldad and Medad were not at the tent meeting when God was handing out doses of God's Spirit but God still used them to teach and preach. So today we must be open and listen to the voices of people who come from outside of the organized church because God is probably using them to share with all of us what is God's will.

3. God works through a diverse group of people. There is a part of me that wants everyone to be like me. There's a part of you that wants everyone to be like you. But when we say that we are trying to control God's Holy Spirit. For us here at Allison Creek to be reflective of Pentecost then we must continue to be intentional in becoming more diverse racially, economically, and culturally.

Our increase here at Allison Creek in racial diversity and cultural diversity is a reflection of Pentecost in our community and we must continue to be welcoming to all people regardless of their race, nationality, culture, or economics.

Soon we will gather around the communion table.

This table is a place where all are welcome.

This is a table that celebrates the diversity that God calls to gather at God's table.  
AMEN.

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-Ford, Lacy, *Deliver Us from Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South*, Oxford, 2009

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