

It seemed that Miriam was the ring leader and Aaron followed suit. It is rare in the Old Testament for a woman's name to appear before a man's and yet Miriam is named before Aaron. Literally translated the feminine singular verb also ignores the plural subject and emphasizes Miriam's role. Literally translated the passage says, **Miriam and Aaron, she began to talk against Moses.**

The attack Miriam and her brother Aaron brought against Moses was twofold. The first part of the attack was an attack on his personal life. This attack was especially dirty because they used what could have been considered an ethnic slur at the time calling Zipporah, Moses' wife, a Cushite. (Cush was in southern Egypt, in modern day North Africa, perhaps Ethiopia.) Even though she was more likely from a different part of Egypt Miriam and Aaron chose to use this more derogatory term.

Our lesson tells us that **Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite.**

Appealing to the ethnic pride of the Israelites, Miriam and Aaron stirred up racial tensions because they wanted the people to question Moses in any way so they could move in and take some of their brother's power and stature for themselves. And so the second part of their attack naturally followed. **"Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?"**

They were stirring up the people against Moses. In essence saying, *Who was Moses to tell them to do? He didn't even have an Israelite wife? Did he really have in mind the interest of the people? Why should he alone be the one to lead them?* Aaron and Miriam of course did this for their own advantage. In pride and jealousy they sought to tear down their little brother Moses in order to get more honor for themselves.

Most people would have naturally reacted with a knee-jerk show of pride in return. Most people would naturally respond with an attitude that says, *"Nobody's going to attack my family, slander my good name, and question my authority and get away with it. They are going to pay."* If you and I are put in that situation, how would we react? Would we not want revenge? Would we not do all we can to make sure such people, whom we trusted and then who turned on us, got what was coming to them? I think most people would act in such a way. However, Moses wasn't like most people, and it does not seem that it was Moses' intention to get revenge. Not overly concerned about damage to his pride, he was more inclined to put it in the Lord's hands. And in this case God certainly handled it.

The Bible tells us the LORD heard about this and summoned Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle) to address

this issue in his presence at God's house. So the three of them came to the Tabernacle and God called Miriam and Aaron to task. Moses was God's servant, a servant like none other. No other prophet, no other leader, had seen God and talked with God, and had received council and instruction directly from God like Moses. It was clear that Moses was the LORD's servant and the leader of his people and to question his authority was foolish and harmful to the entire assembly. In their pride, in self ambition, in their arrogance, jealousy and conceit, Miriam and Aaron had spoken not only against Moses but against the LORD, and now the LORD laid waste to their pride. He put these two trouble makers squarely in their place. He brought them from riding high on their own arrogance, to seeing clearly how foolish and petty and small they had been. And as the Lord's anger burned against these two instigators he left them and as he left them Miriam was stricken with the awful disease of leprosy. **¹⁰ When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam—leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy;**

Having been rebuked and humbled by God and now seeing his sister's grave condition, Aaron repented. He turned to his brother Moses. He reaffirmed Moses' position as leader by calling him my lord and pleaded for help. **"Please, my lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed... Spare her, save her from this horrible flesh eating disease.**

And now, this is where the humility and patient endurance of Moses shines the brightest. Immediately he prays to God on behalf of his sister. There was no hesitation to revel in the fact that this person who had so wronged him was getting what she deserved, but instead he prayed for her. He prayed that the mighty Lord would take away this disease.

Miriam had questioned Moses, had stirred up the people, and had grumbled against God, and therefore this is where we see the mercy of our LORD shine the brightest. Just as quickly as that awful disease came up her, so it also left her. The LORD heard his servant's prayer and he relented.

However, Miriam's sin would not go unnoticed. She had disgraced her God. She had disgraced herself. She had foolishly sinned and her sin had consequences. Like a daughter who had disgraced disgraces her Israelite father receives rebuke and is separated from the assembly Miriam would have to be taken outside of the assembly for 7 days. But God would not desert her completely. The LORD made sure that the people did not leave until Miriam was again among them. God could have forgotten about her and left her behind because of her selfish and prideful

actions, but God had mercy on her. And in the big picture of it all God preserved his chosen people from disaster so that the Savior would be born just as he promised.

This mercy of God is what daily changes us and transforms our hearts. How many times haven't we rebelled against God in thought, word, and deed? How many times haven't we had prideful thoughts that questioned God or grumbled against him? How many times have we spoken harsh and hurtful words against our brother or sister, or a neighbor or about someone at church? How many times have we in pride and selfish ambition retaliated or at least sought to get revenge instead of turning the other cheek? How many times instead of praying for our enemies as the Lord has commanded us haven't we wished evil upon them? How many times have we fallen short of God's holy standards and deserved God's wrath for our disobedience? We deserve God to punish us and to forget about us, but he continues to have mercy on us.

Our many sins have consequences, but in his love he calls us to repentance. He shows us how prideful we have been. He humbles us and then leads us to live lives of humble service out of thankfulness to Christ. For Christ Jesus was punished in my place. On the cross Jesus took on the punishment for my rebelliousness. God's anger burned against him for my foolish sin. And now through Christ Jesus I am cleansed. Now I am forgiven. And this good news daily changes our hearts from cold dark factories of selfish pride to hearts that are filled with the sunshine of Christ's love and humility. This good news fills our hearts and lives and produces wonderful fruits of patience and humble service. And now when we are tempted to act in selfish pride, the Lord reminds us how merciful he was to us.

It is this mercy and patience of God that is so humbling. That God would take a rebellious creature like me to be his own. Who am I therefore to desire and demand revenge when God patiently endures so much from me, a sinner? This patient endurance of God leads me to act in love and concern for others when I remember that God loved me so much that he sent his Son for me. He took on that punishment that as an enemy of God I deserved.

It is difficult to endure slander, harsh words, and infuriating remarks from our enemies, but the LORD teaches us to swallow our pride and patiently endure those who harass us. He teaches us not to stoop down to their level and sling mud along with them, but the LORD teaches us to trust in his perfect justice and put all things into his mighty hands. He teaches us to trust that he will make all things, even the worst of things, to work out for the good of those who love him.

As we live in this world that teaches us to defend our pride at all costs, in our Word for today the Lord teaches us the important lesson of humility.

The Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost September 30, 2012
St. Matthew's Danube & St. Matthew Flora Twp. MN (WELS)
Pastor Mike Kuschel

A Lesson in Humility

I don't think Moses would last long in the political world of today. He was too humble. Today if a politician is attacked that politician makes sure to defend his or her pride and finds a way to even the score. As we inch toward the election in November we see it daily on television. One negative ad leads to two more. Questions are raised about the personal character of the one and then the other, old sound bites are dug up and often they are twisted to make the opponent look bad; and the mudslinging ensues. Too often such endeavors turn into two sides letting their pride take them over the edge and into harsh and shameful behavior.

This was certainly not Moses' style. Such prideful behavior was not his mode of operation. In fact, the bible calls Moses, (the most humble man on the face of the earth). And our lesson from the book of Numbers for today is certainly a testament to that claim.

The book of Numbers records the journey of God's chosen people from Mt. Sinai to the Promised Land. God had told his servant Moses to take a census of all the people and to give them special instructions before they set out for Canaan. God had delivered them and now he promised that he would take care of them, provide for them, and protect them every step of the way. However, the book of Numbers not only records the census and the journey, but it also records the erosion of the Israelites spiritual condition. As they journeyed under the Lord's care to the Promised Land, the people found one thing after another to complain about, they lost their trust in God, and finally they rebelled against God. Along the way the people complained about the journey, they grumbled about the food (even though it was food miraculously sent from God), and they grumbled against their God-given leader. And thus the mudslinging against Moses began.

I supposed Moses expected opposition. I supposed he expected some among this group of people to grumble and complain as they went on this long journey through the difficult terrain. However, what made this first particular attack so insidious was that it came from his very own family. Miriam and Aaron, Moses' own older sister and older brother had

started to tarnish his name and question his credibility as a leader. And these two, who should have been supporting, their brother and God's chosen leader, instead invited those around them to think less of Moses as a person and a leader.