

***Numbers 11:16, 21-24. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." <sup>28</sup> Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!" <sup>29</sup> 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!"***

***We are to be zealous for the kingdom of God***

- 1. We are to reject self-importance***
- 2. We are to seek the kingdom's good***

It is God's will that his word is proclaimed throughout the world. That is the simple message that is proclaimed in a variety of different ways in our lessons for today. And while we use of gifts to support this work and carry out this work throughout the year this is the time of the year that we put on public focus on the mission work being done. Around the time of the harvest of the land we often talk about the spiritual harvest that God wants to bring in as well. And so it is; our fall calendars often include several opportunities to hear about mission work. Owls meetings and LWMS rallies and MLC Auxiliary meetings and Mission Festivals all take place as we get together to hear special presentations about mission trips and mission work being done. This year some of the ladies from our congregation were able to go to the LWMS rally in Winthrop and hear students who participated in a program that sends students all around the country and throughout the world to assist congregations as they seek to spread the gospel. It is also an annual tradition for our churches to hold a mission fest where we come together and learn more about a specific form of ministry being carried out. Next week is Mission Fest and we will be able to hear from Pastor Dan Rautenberg and his work with Apache Christian Training School in Arizona.

The overriding feeling for many of these rallies and festivals is certainly a positive one. It is often a very uplifting and inspiring environment. And that is the way that it should be. It is great when the gospel is shared by young men and women jumping into a new experience. It is wonderful when the gospel is shared by an experienced missionary who is doing good work connecting with the community and equipping men and women to be called servants and capable volunteers. It is a wonderful thing whenever and wherever the gospel is shared. We rejoice because the good news is being brought to more people.

However, because sin has corrupted our hearts and lives so thoroughly, instead of rejoicing there are moments that a part of us cringes with jealousy. Instead of praising God that he is raising up and using faithful servants to work in his kingdom a twinge of envy soon becomes a destructive storm of competition, suspicion, and ridicule. Instead of supporting and encouraging, we question and attack. Instead of being inspired by a fellow believer's story we become hurt and defensive. *Why couldn't God use me like that? Why does she get to serve her Lord that why and I don't? What makes him so special? What makes her qualified? Why does this man's ministry look so much more successful than mine?* And if a person happens to do things in a little different way, we are quick to point out differences and things that we perceive as wrong not because there are sinful or unwise, but rather we call it wrong because it is not the way that we would do it.

Now perhaps this envy and jealousy may not show up for you that much at rallies and festivals, likely it rears its ugly head more often within the everyday workings of a congregation. Instead of thanking God for a fellow believer who has been given the ability to speak, or lead, or serve, we criticize or we talk behind his or her back. *What makes her think she is so special? Why is he on all those boards? Who does he think he's impressing?* And so instead of serving the Lord in unity, instead of using the gifts that God gives us and working together as the body of Christ, selfish ambition win out. We let our own misguided need for recognition and praise negatively affect and hinder the work of the gospel.

We know this shouldn't be, but it happens. And it happened for one of the greatest leaders of God's people. Joshua son of Nun was a great commander of the Israelite army, a faithful servant of the Lord who would eventually succeed Moses and lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. Today, however, we see him as simply a long time trusted aid and servant of Moses whose heart wasn't quite in the right place. In our lesson Joshua puts his loyalty to Moses in the way of the work of the Lord. And therefore Moses reminds Joshua and he reminds us that we are to be zealous for the kingdom. We are to reject self-importance and we are to seek the kingdom's good.

At the time Moses had begun to wither under the intense pressures of leading this people to the Promised Land. They were starting to grumble constantly, they were questioning his authority, and starting to become unruly. So Moses asked the Lord for help. In his plea Moses seems exhausted as he pictures himself as an overwhelmed nurse or a single mother who cannot simply carry the burden of caring for all these people himself. He pleads for a break, some assistance, some relief. He knew he couldn't do all the work himself and so he asked the Lord for help. <sup>12</sup> *Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers?...* <sup>14</sup> *I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me.* (Number 11:14.) The Lord heard his servant's prayer and answered Moses. The Lord would give him the help that he would need. *"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.*

And so Moses humbly went out and told the people what God had said, and then Moses did as the LORD had commanded him. He gathered well respected leaders from among the people and brought them to Tent of Meeting. He knew this would be good for God's people. He knew that 70 men could better serve the needs of the people than just one. And as they were gathered the LORD came down in the cloud that was the visible reminder of his gracious presence. The LORD spoke with Moses and he took of the Spirit that was on Moses and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. This action of the LORD in no way lessened Moses' gift of the Spirit and his role as leader. Like one torch being used to light 70 more, Moses role was not diminished. His light continued to shine brightly, but now there were more who were able to light the way. And God made it clear that these men were now sent out by him to assist Moses for the good of the kingdom, but giving them a special manifestation of the Spirit and the gift to prophesy for a short time.

However, not everyone was so quick to praise God for the new and capable leaders. Two of these new elders, who for an unknown reason were not at the Tent of Meeting received their gift and started prophesying in the camp. This caused a commotion among the people and a young man came running to report this news to Moses. *"Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."* <sup>28</sup> *Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!"* Instead of rejoicing and thankfulness to God something within Joshua lashed out in panic and distress. Joshua had seen this not as a blessing, but as an attempt to challenge the authority of Moses.

Moses quickly 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!"* Again we learn an important lesson in humility from God's servant Moses. The

overall work of the kingdom was far more important than his place or Joshua's place in it. Rather it was Moses' desire that LORD would give his Holy Spirit to all His people so that all God's people may serve our LORD with many different gifts in many different ways.

Dear friends, each one of us has this problem of jealousy and envy deep within our hearts and Satan wants nothing more than for the members of the church to quarrel and be envious and jealous of each other. He wants Christians to be caught up in posturing and rivalries instead of working together in peace and unity. He wants to argue with each other and tear each other down. The devil wants the Christian church to be so caught up in inner turmoil and in-fighting that it effects and hinders the preaching of the gospel.

These are all things that Satan and our flesh bring about because not only are lips and hands and our eyes contaminated with the filth of sin, but our hearts are thoroughly infected. Selfish ambition, vain conceit, pride and selfishness threaten God's people and God's church from within. But the blood of Jesus cleanses us. It purifies us. In love he cuts out and removes that jealous heart and graciously gives us a new heart that is not self serving, but bleeds to serve God's kingdom, that desires to encourage our fellow believers.

The LORD, in his grace, has saved us. He has given us his Holy Spirit. He has given us his Holy Word. He has given us purpose by uniting us to his body the Church. He has blessed the members of this congregation and the members of this Synod with so many different talents and gifts and abilities to use as members of his body. We pray that the LORD might lead his people, especially the people in this congregation, to recognize opportunities where they can use their individual and varied gifts. When members among us use their gifts of music, or leadership, or skill, or encouraging in support of the work of God's kingdom may we not act in jealousy but may we react with thanksgiving. When the LORD gives success to congregations and ministries within our Synod may he purge from our hearts every notion of envy, but instead fill our hearts with joy and put praise on our lips that God's work is being done. May we all learn that the work of God's kingdom is not about bringing praise to ourselves and to those we serve with, but it is about bringing praise to God.

In these days of fall when we give special attention to God's harvest and the work of bringing it in may the Lord give us a humble and selfless spirit that truly desires what is best for the church. May he create in us a new heart and a renewed spirit that prays for God to give his Spirit to his people and guide them in united service to the cross. Amen.