

Pastor Roy's Sermon from September 27, 2015

Moses has led the people from slavery in Egypt after the plagues against the Egyptians. The Red Sea parts so that Israel can escape the Egyptian army. From the start, Moses regularly talks with God. Moses is a mighty, faithful leader. And Moses is emotionally engaged. He throws the tablets down to get their idolatrous attention at Sinai. He is angry with the people for their lack of trust, he strikes the rock with his staff instead of telling the water to come forth. In today's reading he becomes angry with the complaining people and asks that God take his life. He is tired of disappointment. He becomes weary of life. "Take me, if I have found favor in your sight, and do not let me see their misery.

He is not whining. He is not a harsh, angry prophet. He is tired. He is exhausted. He does not see how this can turn out well. He wants the Hebrews to have faith and succeed in this journey into the Promised Land. He longs for their faith. He can't stand the misery.

What happens next in all this complaining? Is everyone destroyed? Does God take Moses' life? Neither. In fact there are two endings of the story. It appears that two similar stories of God's response to the complaining Israelites have been joined into one in this chapter. In the second story, quail fly in and the Israelites greedily grab much more than they can use and Yahweh causes a plague to break out against the greedy. And they bury their dead. That is the face of greed. The story still plays out today. Desperate greed leads to anxiety and stress, plague and disaster, famine and war. Here ends story number 2. Back to story number 1.

Moses complains to God, offers his resignation, but then is taught to share his burden with the other leaders. There are 70 leaders. They are gathered together and the Moses' spirit is shared with them. And Moses Spirit is mingled with God's Spirit. There is no clear distinction between Moses' spirit and what we think of as the Holy Spirit. This intermingling of Spirit is the whole reason Moses' spirit is worth sharing with the elders. We tend to make clear distinctions between humanity and divinity, but that is not necessarily the case in the Scriptures. The Spirit of God is always present in a strong way with the prophets and also leaders who follow in the ways of God. Also, the lines are blurred when it comes to the Spirit and also when it comes to Jesus. Jesus is humanity and divinity mingled. Theology and dogma try to make clear distinctions, but the Scriptures are never concerned about protecting God from the stuff of earth and humanity.

In this story, Moses' spirit is mingled with God's Spirit and both are mingled with the elders.

Two elders, Eldad and Medad, for whatever reason, are not with the other elders, but also receive this mingled Spirit of passion, love, mercy, and trust, humanity and divinity. Joshua, the next leader of Israel, complains that they are prophesying since they don't belong to the prophets of the tent. Moses response—Oh that everyone were a prophet and that God would put the Spirit on them all. Moses is passionate about two things: God and Israel.

As with Moses, so with Jesus. The disciples come complaining that other people are doing good things in Jesus' name without his express permission. These demon casters didn't do their time like the rest of us. They shouldn't be sharing in the glory!

Jesus, like Moses, explains that if good is done in the spirit of his name, then the person doing the good must also be good and blessed by God. The Spirit will not be trapped in tidy boxes or understandings or beliefs. The disciples thought of themselves as the true bearers of Jesus' message. No one else.

And do we not think the same way at times? If the Spirit acts through us, great! But we're leery deny the Spirit speaking through a scientist proclaiming the need to care for the earth and have regulations that curb personal and corporate abuse and neglect of creation. We are tempted to deny the Spirit speaking through a Buddhist who expresses profound wisdom about the process of faith and meditation toward inward and outward peace. We wonder that the Spirit might speak to and through a Muslim who courageously goes on

pilgrimage as an act of faith despite the physical dangers involved. Finally, if the Spirit wishes to speak through an atheist who calls the Church to accountability for its slowness to be honest and open and filled with love rather than judgment, so be it!

Jesus and Moses both proclaim that we are not in a position to judge who may speak for the Spirit. Whoever gives the water, receives the reward.

Oh that all people had the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Moses mingled with the Spirit of God. It is not up to us to judge who is worthy of the name of Christ and who is not.

We are invited by Jesus to work with those who are willing to work with us, for the cause of peace and compassion. We are invited to pray for and help those who are doing the work of Christ, regardless of the name and faith they claim.

Our distinctions and judgments fail as did the Israelites greedily gathering up meat. Joshua and the disciples clung to what they thought was theirs. They were reprov'd, mercifully not with a plague.

The Spirit is moving among us. The Spirit is also moving through the other churches and even through other faith communities who have the Spirit of Christ which cannot be solely held by us.

May we embrace this Spirit and allow her words and work to flow from us and from all others who are willing and eager to join in. Amen.