

The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 4, 2015
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

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...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. 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. 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. A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!" 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!" (NIV)

Are you jealous or zealous? Do you go to school and look at the other students and become jealous? You think: *"She barely studied for that test and gets another A+ - it makes me sick. Or why does he have to be so good at everything – I wish I had that boy's gifts and abilities."* Or do you do to school each day zealous? You focus on using the gifts you have and doing your best in the classroom or on the field or in the band or in whatever you do. You work hard to improve the skills you do have. Do you go to work and look with envy on those with higher positions? Are you jealous of those at work who seemed to climb up the ladder with little effort, those who could buy and sell everything you have, those who seem to always get it right? Or do you jump out of bed early on Monday morning ready and eager to take on the responsibilities, the tasks, the demands, and the deadlines that lie ahead of you for the week? Are you zealous to get your job done and be the very best employee at what you do? Do you look at other people's marriage and family and think not even the Brady Bunch had it so well? Are you jealous when we see a husband and wife who love and respect each other and have kids that listen and obey? Or are you zealous to be the very best husband, or wife, or parent, or child you can be today? Are you willing to keep working with God's help to do better in whatever role you are in?

Are you jealous or zealous? This morning our lesson from God's Word has us considering this question when it comes to God's church and the work we do for Him. Are we jealous when it comes to the gifts God has given to others? Or are we zealous to use what we have? When it comes to serving the Lord, to confessing our faith and letting our light shine, to telling others about the Savior, to giving generous offerings, and to laboring in God's vineyard, are we jealous or are we zealous? This morning, as we meditate on this word of God from Numbers I pray we ask: **Lord, Make Us Zealous not Jealous for your Work.**

Here in Numbers is one of those critical points in the relationship between the Lord and the children of Israel. For some time God had miraculously fed them with daily manna. But it wasn't before long that it isn't good enough. We read: they *"began to crave other food...and said 'If only we had meat to eat. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but*

this manna!” They are sick and tired of the food God was providing for them. But it isn’t just about food; this is about their relationship with the Lord - who led them out of slavery in Egypt - who provided for them every time they were in need. They are tired of following what God has to say. They no longer want to eat what He has provided for them. Some of them even dreamed of going back to Egypt. Imagine that! With their complaints they are really stating, ***“Lord, we have had enough of doing things Your way. We’re miserable!”***

I mean this in the nicest way possible, but we don’t even have 100 members here at Amazing Grace and there are times it feels like my hands are more than full. Please understand I’m not saying we have only grumblers and complainers like the Israelites were doing here. However, I am reminded all the time we are living in a sin sick world. I see what sin, sometimes our own and other times what the sin of others, does in our lives. There are times when there is more trouble than I have time for, more prayers than I able to pray, more problems that need to be solved which probably don’t get the attention they deserve. Now I think about Moses here who was the shepherd of not just under 100 people but over 2 million! Is it really surprising that at this point Moses has kind of had enough? Moses cries out to the Lord: ***“Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me?...Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, ‘Give us meat to eat! I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me.”***

Now our text provides the Lord’s answer. ***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.”*** The Lord would provide meat for the Israelites but, because they needed something more than food for the body, the Lord had another plan. ***“Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with (Moses), and he took the Spirit that was on him and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied.”*** Picture it as God taking one candle and lighting 70 more candles. He filled 70 men with His Holy Spirit in a special way so that they could speak His Word to their fellow Jews. Now more of God’s work could get done. What a gift! What an awesome blessing!

Yet two of these 70 men (Eldad and Medad) did not make it out the Tent with the others. We do not know the reason why they were not there, but it isn’t serious enough to cause God to change His mind about giving them His Spirit. As proof they too prophesied along with the others. But there was one man who was not happy with it. That man was Moses’ assistant Joshua. Joshua, obviously upset that they were somehow stealing some of the glory from Moses, speaks up: ***“Moses, my lord, stop them!”*** Very similar to what the disciples say to Jesus in our gospel lesson. Moses’ answer teaches us a valuable lesson. ***“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!”***

Are we jealous or zealous? Moses points out the foolishness of being jealous for his sake. It wasn’t about Moses! It is not about us! Is this not an important lesson for God’s church? For envy and jealousy creep through these walls too. We can get caught up about who gets to do what for the Lord or who is not doing this or that. We might get a bit envious of other people’s spiritual gifts. We can become jealous even of Christian brothers and sisters who are serving the Lord. How foolish is that! The devil knows well how destructive jealousy can be in the home, at work, and especially at church. The devil wants us to forget that it is the Lord’s Church, and he wants us to turn it into our Church.

What a reminder this type of jealousy is of our need for a Savior! We need a Savior who was never sinfully jealous. We need a Savior to zealously do the work He came to do. This is exactly what we have in Jesus. He never cared about who got the glory because His goal was to glorify His Father in heaven. He never became jealous of what others were doing or not doing; instead he got down on His hands and knees and washed the dirt off of His own disciples' feet. But more than that Jesus did the unthinkable. He became sin for us. He took all our sinful jealousy and foolish envy to the cross. There Jesus was punished and killed for it. The only One who truly had reason to be jealous instead was zealous to take all our sins away and rise again to bring us eternal life. Now we have work to do – all of us! We have good news to proclaim – of sins forgiven – of peace with God – of a relationship with our Creator – of an open heaven.

This is why I love Moses' answer to Joshua's concern. "***I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!***" So dear friends, at school, at work, at home, and here at church, be zealous. Pray the Lord fills you with zeal every day to use the gifts He has given you. Encourage others and help others use their gifts. Pray for the Spirit's help to wake up each day ready to serve and love Him who first loved you. When you see how much your Savior loves you there is no need to be jealous or envious of anyone. Are we jealous or zealous? When our eyes are fixed on Jesus it is an easy answer! Amen.