

Sermon Prompt:

Numbers 11:4-6; 10 – 16; 24 – 29. Lectionary September 26, 2021 OT Reading.

The book of Numbers chronicles the Israelites and their tenuous relationship with God in the wilderness, it established their rituals and their wanderings, their faith and their tendency toward self-reliance and sabotage.

In chapter 11, our text for this week, we find Moses, the leader/prophet listening to the people at the doors of their tents complaining about the Lord's provisions for their journey toward the Promise. They are longing for the days of old when they were slaves in Egypt. Everyone is frustrated. The *people* are frustrated complaining about the manna provided by God. *Moses* is frustrated reminding God he neither called himself to leadership nor did he birth these ungrateful Israelites. *God* is frustrated with the Israelites ignoring God's largess and love.

There is hope that you will see yourself in characters of this text and be inspired to accept God's call to engage your unique gifts, graces, and passions to lead in the places of influence where you have witness. The hope is that you will accept your call to lead your people out of the bondage of division and lack, into the places of promise where there is abundance, where there is enough for everyone, and where every person can live into fullness and flourishing.

“Listen God is calling; through the word inviting. Offering forgiveness, comfort and joy.” [Tanzanian Folk song]

When we step into this text, we find Moses attempting to convince God that the burden of leadership is more than he can bear.

How often do we find ourselves in the thankless role of leadership? In our current social reality, we too, are navigating a wilderness journey. There are numerous barriers to our modern day prophetically imagined promise. Yes, we are still navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. But, we are also facing crises of integrity of our democracy – retrenchment of voting rights, effective stewardship of our natural resources – global warming producing devastating fires and flooding, as well, we are navigating a racial justice reckoning effecting disparate treatment of black and brown bodies through police-community relations and immigration policies. The divisive language on news outlets is also creating a crisis in relationship-building, dividing us by our differences while ignoring our common desire for comfort, joy, and peace. Who would want to lead in times such as this! Yet, “the whole earth is groaning for the revealing of the children of God.” [Romans 8:29] The earth is craving leadership in these times and it is possible that we, like Moses, find this too much to bear.

This text describes the nature of leadership:

- that true leadership emerges from a posture of reverence toward God.

- that, like the Israelites in our story who were craving meat, fish, leeks, onions and garlic, we are craving substance in the ways we relate to each other and the world.
- and, that God responds to Moses' resistance and ours, with a 'systemic' concern for the resolution to our wanderings. Instead of addressing Moses' complaint about the people he has been charged to guide, God gives him "prophetic imagination" to invite others to join him in leadership. "Gather seventy elders and bring them to the tent of meeting", God says to Moses and to us. Then God places some of the 'spirit' that was on Moses onto the 70 elders!
- The way we achieve the promise of Reconciliation, is to bring every gift and talent into the work of tearing down the dividing walls between us, so that we might "as a whole people of God, get to the Promise!"

May it be so, as we listen and follow God's calling.

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