

September 27, 2015 18th after Pentecost Homecoming

Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29

Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Psalms 19:7-14, James 5:13-20, Mark 9:38-50

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our rock, our redeemer. Amen

Grace and peace to you, beloved of Christ, grace and peace.

A friend tells the story of her four year old, the big brother of two younger sisters.

To the four year old's eyes, these trouble-prone little girls need his zealous corralling, He spends his days reporting to his mom the antics of the little ones, and their perennial need for correction. This recently prompted my friend and her son to discuss what it means to be a tattler, a brand new concept to his four year old mind, and more than a little disappointing.

As they wrapped up their conversation and it became more real, he clarified,

"So, I am just going to be in charge of me?" he continued, "That is so boring!"

I wonder if Joshua had a similar response?

When Moses called together the 70 and God spread a bit of the spirit amongst these elders, Eldad and Medad are registered as part of this group of elders, but the story tells us, they aren't present that day. For some reason they are back in the village, not with the others...I don't know why: Maybe mobility was a challenge. Maybe they needed to stay back to care for a youngster or a spouse. Maybe they didn't hear the invitation.

I don't know why they aren't there amongst the 70, but we learn that Eldad and Medad have Spirit, too, and are prophesying to those who also remain in the village.

Poor Joshua, Moses' assistant, is feeling out of control, he's alarmed,

"Moses, Moses," Joshua tattles, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the village, stop them, Moses."

Moses, though, stops Joshua: "Are you jealous for my sake, Joshua?"

Would that all God's people were prophets, and that God would put God's spirit on them!"

I can almost hear Joshua, echoing that four year old: *You mean that I am just in charge of me?*

Really, you don't want me controlling the Spirit, or thinking I can control it?

Jesus' disciples have a response similar to Joshua in our gospel this morning:

"Teacher, teacher," they cry to Jesus, "We saw someone casting out demons in your name.

We tried to stop him, because he was not following us."

Jesus responds, "Don't stop him. Whoever is not against us, is for us."

Last week retired Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire, Gene Robinson, wrote an Open Letter to the Pope. Apparently, Bishop Robinson and Sister Simone Campbell had been invited to the White House to meet the Pope, but senior Vatican officials were offended by their potential presence

Bishop Robinson humbly and boldly writes of the beliefs he and Pope Francis share in common and also their likely disagreements. He writes,

“I am willing to acknowledge the saintly integrity with which you hold your views, even if I disagree with them, as I hope you might acknowledge my striving for integrity in mine.”

Bishop Robinson continues, “It seems that in these times, the greatest sin would be to write one another off and to stop caring about one another.”

Without even trying—usually meaning no ill—we humans have our ways of trying to control the Holy Spirit, trying to delineate where and how God gets shared, or how and to whom God’s love is offered.

As much as my sin is like Joshua’s, like the disciples, like so many others trying to be the gate keeper for the Spirit, the truth is, I love this story of Eldad and Medad precisely because it convicts me how creatively and powerfully God’s Spirit is at work, often in spite of us.

I realize that we all take our turn as Joshua or the disciples, grasping to control.

Today I’m really more curious, how we are like Eldad and Medad.

How are you prophesying and sharing the spirit back in your village or community?

How are you the one casting out the demons of despair, offering healing and hope in Jesus’ name?

How are you using your prophet voice and your Spirit-led body to act right where you are?

Is there a buzz over at Augustana or Chandler Place where some of you live and surely spread God’s spirit?

Is there a deep grappling with poverty or racial inequity and a listening for the Spirit as you take action?

I was thinking about Eldad and Medad this past Wednesday as I walked cross campus.

Our Lutheran Campus Pastor here at the U, Pastor Kate, and our campus ministry liaison, Tim, and I have a plan—each Wednesday at noon we’ll stake out a little spot in the mall between Coffman and Northrup and one of us will be present.

We’ll wear our clergy shirts, so for better or worse we look “pastor-like.”

We’ll find a spot to sit or bring some chairs.

We’ll carry some brochures for Lutheran Campus Ministry and for the church.

We’ll have a chalk board or a sign that says something catchy and invites conversation.

So there I was on Wednesday outside of my own usual patterns for ministry.

I found a well-trafficked spot and set up a sign: **“The world is full of stories... please, tell us yours.”**

I'll be honest, this at first made me nervous, self conscious. – I mean, How would you feel?

It was new and a little intimidating, but it was an important experience:

important because maybe there was a conversation that needed having,
important—and honestly, this was the big one—important because over and over again I and we need
to cross that threshold of the campus.

As we, you and I, this congregation, seek again to figure out what it means to be in ministry right here in
Dinkytown, on the edge of the U of M campus, now in the middle of blocks of student housing....
we need to leave our safety zones and our comfortable routines and dare use the prophet's ears
and voice both inside and far beyond the church building.

So, did I have a lot of conversations on Wednesday on the mall? Honestly, no

I had one big one with a second year student sorting out his faith, that was important in itself.

Then, all of a sudden the person sitting next to me was our very own congregational president, Beth Kautz.

On a campus of 55,000 students and plenty of staff and faculty, there is Beth, just happening by after
teaching her German class—she was as surprised as I was!

I had been inviting folks to tell me their story.

Truth is, our story here at University Lutheran Church of Hope is one we need to keep telling too.

We need to keep sharing what God is doing now in this faithful community, through each one of us.

In a strangely Spirit-led way, sitting there on the mall, Beth and I talked loosely about our church's story.

We're planning for a leadership retreat on Saturday with our Vision and Governance Board.

We'll continue your good work from the last years, especially focused on our mission, really, God's mission.

Friend's in Christ, it's Homecoming Sunday.

After a long summer, we return to our fall schedule and faith formation for all ages.

As we begin children and youth programs, I give thanks for parents, grandparents, others, who rouse sleepy
kids and youth, and help them be here at church—it's not easy, there are lots of choices for our time.

Thank you for making this community and our worship and faith formation a priority.

Today are so glad that many of our homebound members can be here!

These pillars of our congregation rarely are able to attend services and yet we stay connected.

Pastor Esther and the folks from the Friendly Visitors are a vital and spirited link through the seasons.

Beloved people of Christ, on this Homecoming Sunday, we come home, only to be sent forth.

May the same Spirit that moved in Eldad and Medad, move in you. Go in peace, serve the Lord! Amen.