

Risky Mission Business

June 12, 2011

40 years in the wilderness...Complaining- craving meat...God has already provided manna for food, but they are not satisfied. So Moses complains to the Lord who says choose 70 elders to help you lead this people and share the burden. This is the telling of the Ordination of these elders at the Tent of Meeting where they gathered to worship in the wilderness days.

Scriptures: Numbers 11:24-30

²⁴So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord; and he gathered seventy elders of the people, and placed them all around the tent. ²⁵Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again. ²⁶Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." ²⁸And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, "My lord Moses, stop them!" ²⁹But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!" ³⁰And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

Acts 2:1-6, 14-21 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. ¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. ²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Proclamation of the Word

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. (Repeat) Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

That is such a lovely little tune, but if you pay attention to the words this is risky business. We are sweetly singing a little centering song, but in reality we are asking God for Pentecost-like Spirit power- the original alternative energy. We should be trembling, our voices cracking, as we sing such a bold song. You may have sung along, but are you really ready for the Spirit of God to melt, mold, fill and use you...use us? This is bold, audacious stuff, folks! Are we really ready for a new Pentecost?

Faith in a dynamic God has sweet moments, but if we really think about it, when God's Spirit moves, things change, people get to work, have a role to play, to proclaim God's truth and prophesy. Remember how most of those chosen to serve protest. Moses stuttered and was not good with words, so he says to God, "I cannot speak." Jeremiah said I am too young. But the spirit of God blows where it will. And even ol' Eldad and Medad catch the spirit out in the camp and begin to prophesy much to Joshua's chagrin.

Sometime we act like Joshua. When God said appoint, anoint, and ordain the 70 elders, the spirit catching hold of Eldad and Medad was out of order. And as Presbyterians, we like things done decently and in order. I do not think Joshua was being unfaithful, just responsible, dutiful and yes even according to Moses perhaps a little jealous for Moses sake. Joshua thought the spirit working through these guys down in the camp might undermine Moses' authority. After all, the calling of elders is still a new thing, and stretches the power with many more. The Central authority is moving out. Perhaps Joshua is afraid of change. He is still getting used to this new model of ministry. Even scarier is this loss of control. What if people just start popping up and begin leading in different directions.

But Moses is not afraid. The opposite of fear is faith. Moses has faith in the God who is guiding and leading them. He trusts. He responds, "Chill out Joshua, what if all the people would prophesy and God's spirit were in them all? Wouldn't that be great, Joshua?"

The story is told of the US exploration of Lewis and Clark in the book *Undaunted Courage*.¹ As the plans for a westward expedition takes shape, the military with its chain of command policy made Lewis the captain and Clark the lieutenant. Lewis was adamant about equally sharing authority with Clark. He insisted they be co-commanders. The request was never granted, but Lewis and Clark operated as co-leaders without the 30 men under them knowing any differently. They collaborated and made decisions together which contributed to the success of their mission.

Shared power means ministry is multiplied. And there are no limits to God's abundance and power. If a gift of the spirit like wisdom is shared with another, it does not diminish the wisdom of the one who shares it. Rather, it is like using a candle to light others. The light becomes even brighter when shared, and the light of the first candle is not extinguished. Spirit-led leaders are humble and gracious rejoicing in the sharing of the gifts. Spirit-led leaders know that it is more important that the light of Christ grows stronger. In the Church the sharing of gifts, burdens, responsibilities and credit does not weaken leaders, but strengthens them and builds up the body of Christ.

We read in Acts last week of Jesus passing the baton, his mission, onto his disciples. He promised them the Spirit and that they will be his witnesses. God fulfills God's promises. They will witness and work even to the ends of the earth. The disciples have a job to do. Remember Moses burdened with the current crisis in the wilderness, the 70 are chosen to share the burden of leadership. The Spirit is given not for personal gain, but for the work of the community to be a blessing and to spread good news of God. And sometimes the most unlikely characters are the ones the Spirit chooses to work through. In Numbers, Cousin Eldad and Medad, did not fit the profile, but God choose to use them. Even at Pentecost the devout Jews are surprised that it is the common Galileans who were rough around the edges, were gifted to speak and witness in a way that could be understood. They were common folk from the camp. They are youth groups, Sunday School groups, and families groups. They are the Susans, the Freds, the Jordans, the Michaels, the Emmas who are open to God's using them....who sing with sincere commitment

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God sends us to witness and work to make known the mighty deeds of God. That sounds daunting and even risky. Do you feel equipped to do this? Many of us do not feel ready to witness. But I believe when we are open to the Spirit, God does equip us to do what we are called upon to do in His name. And it usually starts because we learn of a need someone has. We perceive God's call to respond. We step out. We open ourselves to risk or even suffering. We discover meaning and purpose. We use our resources and our talents.

Let me tell you a discovery I made this week. Our church is getting involved in the *Building Dreams* program through Clemson University. *Building Dreams* is a mentoring program for youth and children whose parents are incarcerated. SC continues to have one of the highest incarceration rates, and the children in the families suffer dramatically. I was reading about the program when I came across a story. A young woman who is a student here, Chardae Anderson, is a success story. In middle school, she kept the secret that her father was in prison from even her closest friends. She was in an alternative school by 7th grade and clearly struggled in School. Through *Building Dreams* she was paired with a woman named Carol who mentored Chardae. Chardae skipped 10th grade and graduated as class Salutatorian of her high school. I was proud of this young woman, but the person that grabbed my attention was Carol Stewart. I have met Carol, her mentor. She is a member of Eastminster Presbyterian in Greenville. We used to take our youth to Montreat youth conferences and see each other. From what I know of Carol, a mother of three, she became a mentor because of her Christian calling to serve those whom Christ came to serve. She is just an average Joe, or average Carol Christian who has responded in faith and allowed the Holy Spirit to move and work through her. You will be hearing more later this summer about the program and how you might minister and serve as a mentor. I loved reading Chardae and Carol's story because it is an example of the community of faith equipping this one person to be sent into the world to show forth the love of God in Jesus Christ. I imagine as they came to know and care about each other, Carol has told Chardae of the God who loves her, upholds her, and guides her life. I imagine Chardae has taught Carol some things too. I am sure it took some courage, commitment, and risk for Carol to become involved in the life of a troubled teenager. The Spirit of God is indeed building dreams through them.

(<http://www2.wspa.com/m/news/2010/jul/28/building-dreams-helping-sc-children-parents-prison-ar-636077/>)

Christ's Spirit powers an alternative community to be energized for the sake of the good news of the gospel. When we risk in faith, the God who is faithful is with us. God is present when two or three gather. God is present in the signs of water, bread, juice, and even fire-flamed ribbons. God is with us and for us, but this gathering God also sends us out. God baptizes us with the inspiration, ability, and strength of the Spirit and sends us to the places where Jesus would go. The Spirit sends us to be with those that Jesus spent the most time with: the lost, the least, and the left out.

Every time Spirit filled Christians act in faith, the prophet Joel's vision becomes real when God pours out God's Spirit upon all flesh "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." Where are you being called and equipped to be a part God's vision and dream?

Thanks be to God who gathers us in and sends us out into this risky mission business.

Laura Smith Conrad
Fort Hill Presbyterian Church

¹ Stephen Ambrose, *undaunted Courage* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005).

Resource which was very helpful. *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 3* Bartlett, Brown, eds.