

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.”²⁵ 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.

²⁶*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.*²⁷*A young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”*

²⁸*Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses’ aide since youth, spoke up and said, “Moses, my lord, stop them!”*

²⁹*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!” (Numbers 11:16, 24-29)*

God’s Spirit is the Key!

What is your church supposed to be like? People have expectations about a church. What do you think this church should be? If we took the time this morning to listen to every person’s answer, we might find that most of what we would say falls into six or eight general categories. But what if we asked all those people who at some time joined our church but have since drifted away or have even joined other churches? Their expectations might be very different from those of the people who continue to worship here. Some of those people might express disappointment or even anger over what our church is and what they experienced here. Sadly, I would guess that even among us who have stayed, some people feel that this congregation is not living up to their expectations.

Sooner or later, that comes back to leadership, doesn’t it? It comes back to me, as your pastor and to the principal and to the members of the church council and the various boards that we’ve elected. Sometimes, we think that better leadership is the answer. But what is leadership in the church? That question lies at the heart of the word of God before us this morning. We tend to think of leadership in terms of communication skills and vision and setting direction. We think in terms of intelligence and wisdom and natural abilities. But you know what? As important as those things can be, they are not the key to spiritual leadership. Then what is? **God’s Spirit is the key!**

I. God’s Spirit makes ministers and

II. God’s Spirit changes ministers.

I.

If it seems like I’ve been preaching about the ministry a great deal lately, don’t get the wrong idea. I’ve been preaching on this topic only because it’s what comes up in the readings for these Sundays. Those readings speak to our situation because every congregation struggles with questions of leadership. The devil never leaves us alone. Since our leaders are sinners and our members are sinners, he has a built in line of attack. But in the face of all that the devil does, **God’s Spirit is the key. He makes ministers.**

Who better to show us this truth than Moses? We have a tendency to de-humanize these great heroes of faith. We think of Moses confronting Pharaoh and parting the Red Sea and receiving the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai and we forget about his sins and weaknesses. The Bible does not forget how weak and frail Moses was. With every great hero of faith in the Bible, we get a healthy dose of their sin and weakness thrown in.

God does that so that we remember who really did those great things. God led the people out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. God gave them the Ten Commandments. The word of God before us today is God’s solution to Moses’ weakness. Now, it’s not that obvious in the verses we read. You need a little context. The people were on their way to the Promised Land. Every morning and every evening, God sent manna to feed them. It just appeared there – all they had to do was pick it up. But after a year of eating manna morning, noon and night, the people were sick of it. They wanted some meat to eat. The rabble started to whine, “We remember all the fish we ate in Egypt and melons and cucumbers! Now all we see is this manna!” What was

Moses to do? At God's command he had led two million people out into the desert. The people's expectations weren't being met and they let him know. So he turned to God and said, **"Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? ... 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. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now...."**

The greatest of all God's Old Testament prophets wanted to die because he couldn't satisfy this people. They never stopped complaining. But God didn't kill Moses. He loved him and he loved these difficult, whiny people. So he told Moses to choose seventy men who were respected as leaders in Israel, and God appointed them to assist Moses in his office as prophet to these people. God chose men who commanded respect. They were already elders and officials of Israel. But he did not choose them on the basis of their natural gifts. He sent his Spirit on them and gave them the gifts they would need. God didn't choose them based on their willingness to serve, either. He didn't ask for volunteers. He told Moses to appoint the men and then summon them to the Tent of Meeting. Notice, two of them didn't go. Eldad and Medad didn't want to be a part of this ministry. But God didn't give them a choice. He set his Spirit on them, too, and they prophesied in the camp.

God didn't care about the expectations of Israel. He cared about their faith. He knew that in a sinful world, they were always going to struggle with disappointment. He chose men to assist Moses in ministering to them in the hardships and disappointments of this life. That is the key point in all of God's ministry decisions. He does not choose ministers to make them happy, or to honor them, or to come up with some way to support their families. All those things do happen in the ministry – it's a joy to help someone through the loss of a loved one or to confirm 8th graders. God's people do honor their pastors and teachers because we proclaim the word. And this work does support our families. But God created the ministry for you, to benefit you, because he loves you. And to make the ministry work the way that it's supposed to, the Holy Spirit works through the word and creates the gifts we need to do his work.

Sometimes we ministers feel sorry for ourselves, like Moses did. Sometimes we're not up to the task God gives us to do. I don't have two million members, thankfully. But I do 570 and you don't all live together in one camp in the desert. You're scattered in an unbelieving society, tuned in to tools that Satan didn't have in the desert, like the internet and TV and your ipod, and you have a level of wealth and an amount of free time that no society in the past ever had to contend with. The devil uses all of that to rip at your faith day after day. The unbeliever in our hearts continually whines and complains about the way God takes care of us. We're not special. Every congregation will face those attacks or worse until the Lord returns. If you think any pastor can solve those problems with our natural gifts, you still don't understand the ministry God gave us.

I can't solve those problems because I'm just as weak and sinful and whiny as Moses was – and probably a good deal more. But Jesus wasn't weak or whiny or sinful. He died to pay for your whininess and mine. Jesus died to pay for our desire to always have more than God gives us. Jesus died and paid for every sin that cripples our congregation and for all the false expectation we have that tear us away from our church. He died and he paid for every minister who ever failed to be the servant God's people needed him to be. And Jesus rose and he forgave me and he forgave you for all that sin. And then he sent his Holy Spirit onto his church at Pentecost. That gift is still ours today. It means that no matter how inept I might be, God will still work through the gospel I proclaim. God will still reach into your heart with his word and change it. God will still comfort you and care for you and use his imperfect servants to give you peace.

II.

God pours his spirit out on all ministers through the word and sacraments. He even did that for Jesus in his baptism. Jesus was sinless, but he was also a real human being. He needed the gifts God gives for ministry. We sinful ministers need those gifts even more. **God's Spirit is the key. He changes ministers.**

When we talk about ministers, we're usually talking about guys like me, who have a call to publicly proclaim God's Word. Moses and the 70 elders were public ministers and God sent his Spirit on them. But right at the end of the reading, God relates the minister to the people we serve. And the desire that we have for ministers is a desire we should have also for each other.

We all want God to change ministers and make them into the servants God wants them to be. What does he want them to be? Well, what happened when word came to Moses that Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the camp? Joshua said, **"Moses, my lord, stop them!"** Joshua was Moses' right hand man and he had great personal loyalty to Moses. He was jealous of Moses' position as the prophet of God. But Moses

was not at all jealous of his position. He said, **“I wish that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”** Seventy more prophets was not nearly enough! Moses wished for even more.

It takes humility to be glad that someone else is moving in on your territory. That humility does not come to us sinners easily. “If I’m the prophet then anyone else that wants to be a prophet should get permission from me!” Moses didn’t feel that way because God had changed him. Every time that God showed Israel his love, Moses was the eye witness of that love. That gospel made Moses humble and willing to serve. It caused him to rejoice when some of the people could serve the Lord and proclaim his message. And Moses longed for all God’s people to reach that level of maturity.

Practically speaking, it wouldn’t make much sense if everybody were a prophet. It wouldn’t make much sense here at Peace if we were all pastors. Who would we preach to? But what a wonderful thing it would be if all of us had the knowledge of God’s word and the maturity of faith that we could proclaim that word to each other! What a wonderful thing it would be if in our families and in our jobs and in our time together, the gospel constantly came forth in our words and actions.

How could that ever be true for us? The Holy Spirit changes us through the gospel message. Every time I preach the gospel to you, God works in my heart to make me more the servant he wants me to be. Every word that actually helps you to see and understand what God is saying is his work. I deserve no credit for anything at all, because I’m a sinner and all I can do is mess up the assignment God has given me. But every time you hear the gospel, the Holy Spirit is working in your heart. Now, the sinner inside you will push back. He may reclaim some ground that the Spirit took today. In this life, God’s work in us will never end. But the Spirit continues to work through the gospel

Too often we forget that. Christian congregations can become personality cults. “I like this pastor.” “I like that pastor.” Now it’s not wrong to like a pastor. But a church becomes a personality cult when we are here only because we love this man or that man. My friends, I hope that none of you ever comes here because you like me. I hope that you come here because you hear about Christ here.

Why do we turn our churches into personality cults? Because we’re sinners. Sinners are always looking for something more exciting than what God has given them. Just like the people in the desert weren’t satisfied with manna that miraculously appeared day after day, we become dissatisfied with the miracle of the gospel. We want something more than Jesus. We want a warm feeling and personal touch. We want an emotional high. We want to be entertained instead of fed. That, too, is sin.

But Jesus keeps forgiving that sin through the message we hear here. He died because we want something different. He died because we think that entertainment would do more for us than gospel preaching. He died because our sinful hearts are never 100% lined up with God. And he washed all that sin away. A flood of his blood burst forth from the cross and smacked into us. It blasted away our sin. When it was done, all that was left was Jesus and his righteousness. So God forgave us. God declared that all that sin that we are guilty of is all gone. He forgave even our desire to be entertained instead of fed.

That is the message of life. God has sent that message to you and to me. I wish that all of you were pastors. Not that we all preached. But that we all could preach because we all had the Scriptures in our hearts and our minds. That would make leadership here better because true spiritual leadership is about bringing Christ to God’s people. The key to all spiritual leadership is the Holy Spirit. He works through the gospel. May he work in your heart. Amen.