

Sermon

October 7 and 8, 2006

Numbers 11

Prayer:

Lead me, God, to listen for your voice.
Lead me to say yes to your call
and to understand that my work
is ministry in your name.
Amen

Our Stewardship focus this month
is "LET GOD LEAD".
And our emphasis today
is "Faith in Daily Labors",
"Faith in Daily Life".

You are ministers.
You are servants of God.
Your life is ministry.

And I'm not just talking about what you do here at church.
That's important.
But equally important
is how you reflect God's love to your family
to your friends
in your work
in your school
in your daily life
in your daily labors.

You are God's missionaries,
God's ministers,
God's servants,
each minute
of each hour
of each day.
Always.

You have a mission.
To reflect God's love.
Last weekend,

we were at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa.
Visiting our son, Brent, for family weekend.
It was wonderful to see him,
watch him play Ultimate Frisbee,
and sing in a concert.
Meet some of his friends.
And spend time as family.

On Sunday morning,
there was a worship service on campus.
And as they read the Old Testament reading from Numbers–
–assigned for last week–
–I thought to myself,
this really fits what I want to talk about next week.

So, when I got home,
I asked Pastor Schoenherr
if he had preached on the Old Testament lesson for last week.
He said he hadn't.
So I will.

It's from the book of Numbers.
When the people were wandering in the wilderness
after Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt.
And you'd think they'd be thrilled
to be free,
after years and years of bondage.

But listen to what they say,
Numbers 11:4-6:

**The rabble among them had a strong craving;
and the Israelites also wept again,
and said:
“If only we had meat to eat!
We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing,
the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks,
the onions, and the garlic;
but now our strength is dried up,
and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.”**

Do you know what the word manna means?
It means “What is it?”

The people had gone into the wilderness.
They were hungry.
So God provided for them.
He gave them food.
He gave them manna.
Whatever it was.

And in 40 years,
can you imagine all the ways they might have eaten manna?
The preacher at Luther got me started thinking about that.

You could have:

Fried manna

Baked manna
Grilled manna
Sauteed manna
Braised manna

Manna casserole

Manna delight
Manna on the grill
Manna pockets
Manna kabobs

French fried manna

Manna pilaf
Manna au gratin
Mashed manna
Creamed manna on toast
Manna teriyaki

Kentucky Fried manna
McManna

And our local favorites:

Manna steaks
Goey manna cake; and
Toasted Mannaoli.

And can you imagine—
—the people got tired of manna.
And they complained to Moses,

saying “Think of all the food we got for free in Egypt”.
While they conveniently forgot
that they got the food because they were slaves.

And how does Moses respond?
Verses 10-15.

**Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families,
all at the entrances of their tents.
Then the Lord became very angry,
and Moses was displeased.
So Moses said to the Lord,
“Why have you treated your servant so badly?
Why have I not found favor in your sight,
that you lay the burden of all this people on me?
Did I conceive all this people?
Did I give birth to them,
that you should say to me,
‘Carry them in your bosom,
as a nurse carries a sucking child,’
to the land that you promised on oath
to their ancestors?
Where am I to get meat to give to all this people?
For they come weeping to me and say,
‘Give us meat to eat!’”
I am not able to carry all this people alone,
for they are too heavy for me.
If this is the way you are going to treat me,
put me to death at once—
—if I have found favor in your sight—
—and do not let me see my misery.**

It seems this complaining is contagious.
“Why are you treating me so badly?”, Moses says.
“If this is the way you are going to treat me,
just kill me right now.”

Moses says:
“It’s your fault, God.”

Fortunately,
God is a gracious God,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Instead of taking Moses up on his offer,
he has a better idea.

Verses 24 and 25:

**So Moses went out and told the people
the words of the Lord;
and he gathered 70 elders of the people,
and placed them all around the tent.
Then 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 70 elders;
and when the spirit rested upon them,
they prophesied.
But they did not do so again.**

And even Eldad and Medad,
who were in the wrong place,
probably didn't follow instructions,
even Eldad and Medad received the spirit.

And Joshua said to Moses,
"My Lord, Moses, stop them!"

But 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."**

Wouldn't it be great
if all of us had God's spirit within us?
You know what?
We do.

Do you remember the Bible passage from the book of Acts,
on the day of Pentecost,
when the Holy Spirit comes in a special way?

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.**

**Even upon my slaves,
both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit...**

It doesn't matter if you're young or old,
male or female.

It doesn't matter if you have a lot of money
or not.

The Holy Spirit is in you.
You are God's missionary.
God's servant.
God's minister.

The work of the church is not done just by pastors.
It's not done just by church staff.
It's not done by just a few leaders.
The main purpose of the church leadership
is to equip all of us for ministry in daily life.

In the book of Ephesians,
the Apostle Paul reminds us that we are given gifts as leaders in order to:

**“...equip the saints for the work of ministry,
for building up the body of Christ,
until all of us come to the unity of the faith,
to the knowledge of the Son of God,
to maturity,
to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”**

Leaders are important as equippers.
But ministry is for everyone.
That's why we put that in the bulletin every week.
Who are the ministers?
The people of Good Shepherd.

And we put that in the bulletin
to remind people like me,
as a pastor,
that I am not the person the congregation pays to do all the ministry.
I am one of the people the congregation calls to equip the saints.
And I need to be reminded of that from time to time.

And we put that in the bulletin
to remind people like you,
the people of Good Shepherd,
that you are the front lines of ministry.
That you are God's witnesses,
God's servants,
God's missionaries,
God's ministers.
And you live that out
in everything you do.

How?
How do you live that out?
By reflecting God's love.

What does that look like at your work?
Or at your school?
Or at your home?
Or in your neighborhood?

I'm not sure.
That is something I encourage you to wonder about.
To pray about.
To discuss with your family—
—maybe around the noon meal table today.
It's something to talk about with your small group.
Or a group of friends—formal or informal.

Wonder together—
—what does it mean for me to be God's minister in my daily life,
in my daily labors?

We have some wonderful examples
on the yellow sheet you've been given today.
Some great examples of faith

from right here in the midst of the congregation.

Take some time to look at those faith stories.

Give thanks for the ministry of each of those people.

And give thanks that God's Spirit is at work
in each of us here.

It's not up to just one person—

—like Moses.

It's not even just up to 70 people—

—like in Numbers.

But it's like the words of Joel,

that Peter spoke on the day of Pentecost:

God declares,

I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh...

We are privileged to live in a time,

when God's Spirit is at work in all of us.

All of you.

Each of you.

That is an wonderful joy.

That is a wonderful responsibility.

God's Spirit is at work in you.

Let God Lead you into a life of service and ministry.

You are God's ministers.

Your reflect God's love in your daily life.

Reflect God's love.

In Jesus' name,

Amen