



September 26, 2021 Worship Sermon "Christian Delegation" Delivered by Rev. Stephen Keiser

Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29; Psalm 19:7-14; James 5:13-20; Mark 9:38-50

Our scriptures this morning describe what it means to work together as the people of God. Our reading from Numbers gives us an image of what happens when people don't work together. Everyone is unhappy and everyone is complaining. The people are complaining because they are tired of eating manna. "Manna, manna, manna... we left the beautiful leeks and melons of Egypt for this?" they complain. And Moses is equally irritable. You can hear it in his words to God. "Why have you treated me so badly?" he complains. "Did I conceive this people? Did I give them birth that I should have to carry them like babies all the way to the Promised Land? If this is the way you're going to treat me, just kill me now and put me out of my misery." Everyone is so cranky, it's almost comical.

So God's offers a solution to the problem and that solution is delegation. Moses is complaining about the situation because he feels like he's got to do everything himself. So, God takes some of the spirit that is on Moses and places it on seventy of the elders so that the burden of leadership can be shared.

Delegation can be difficult for a variety of reasons: first of all, anyone who has difficulty letting go of control is going to try to do everything him or herself, because that way you can be sure that everything will be done exactly the way you want it. Also, when you ask someone for help, it's kind of an admission that you need help, that you can't do it all by yourself, that you're not God. And everyone else is already really busy with their own stuff. Do we really want to intrude on them by asking them to help with our project?

So, unless one is a natural born leader – the alpha dog – one is sometimes reluctant to ask others to share the load.

But obviously, sharing the load is critical to the health of the people of God. Jesus didn't try to do it all by himself – and he was God! He chose disciples and sent them out on mission trips to heal the sick and cast out demons because even Jesus needed the help of others to do the work God had sent him to do. And in this morning's Gospel reading, when John complained about the other people who were casting out demons, Jesus rebuked him. They needed all the help they could get; and if someone wanted to share their mission of healing the world, Jesus was quite happy to let them participate.

The motto of the Lutheran Church is, "God's work, our hands." Not my hands, but our hands, and our feet and our eyes and our wallets and our voices and our imaginations and our talents.

The skills and gifts contained in a community like this are amazing. And God wants all of us to share the work, so that each of us can bring our own unique skills and perspectives into the work that God has given us to do. It's not dependent on any one of us. It's dependent on all of us, with the Spirit of God energizing and guiding us. We can accomplish so much more together than we can alone.

Now, having said all this, I want to talk for a minute specifically about our own congregation and the work we do together. Perhaps you have noticed this, but things have changed a bit over the past year and a half... not only for Christ Lutheran Church but for congregations across the country. During the pandemic, some of our programs - like children's Sunday School - came to a screeching halt. Other programs - like worship and Bible study - continued in an online format. And now we are in this kind of hybrid world where some things are online and some things are in person; some things have restarted and some things may never restart.

Now the nice thing about where we are right now is that it gives you all kinds of options. You don't have to do something just because we have always done it this way. There is no longer a "way that we have always done it." The pandemic put an end to that. The hard thing about where we are right now is that none of us is really sure how to move forward. What programs should you try to resurrect and what should you let die? What new programs that we haven't even thought of should you be putting your energy into?

One thing that is crucially important during a time like this is to be clear about your mission. When the people of Israel were wandering through the wilderness, they did a lot of zigging and zagging; but ultimately they knew where they were headed: the promised land. During the coming months, this congregation may also do some zigging and zagging; but your destination is clear: the Kingdom of God. Or as we put it in our mission statement: We are a growing international community sharing God's love for all the world. Keeping that mission foremost in your minds will help you make decisions for how you will do ministry in the future.

I do want to say a couple of things about online gathering. I'll preface this by admitting that there are things I love about online gathering. I love online committee meetings. I love not having to drive home at ten o'clock at night and try to find a parking spot. And I love the fact that people like Harry Hardee or John Moore Sr. can worship with us even though they are far away... or that people who are sick or homebound can continue to connect with us each Sunday. But there is something extremely important for a congregation about physically gathering - when it is possible - in a particular space.

The other day, I was driving along Allegheny Avenue in North Philadelphia and I came to Kensington Avenue, which is, as you may know, the very epicenter of the heroin epidemic in Eastern Pennsylvania. I have to say, it was pretty shocking to see with my own eyes. Drug deals were happening all over the place right in the open. It was like the King of Prussia of drug trafficking. And then, just a block or two off the Avenue, you saw the tragedy... hordes of

people whose lives were being destroyed by drug addiction. I drove another block or two and there, right in the midst of all this pain and suffering, was a church... and I thought, thank God this church is here in this neighborhood. They have their work cut out for them.

I have similar feelings about Christ Lutheran Community Church, although for different reasons. It is so important that we be here in Upper Darby. People always talk about how they love our congregation's diversity. Well, it's diverse because it's in Upper Darby. Upper Darby is the international community that this congregation seeks to reflect. In Upper Darby, we actually have the opportunity to embody that vision in Revelations where people from every nation, language, and tribe gather before the throne of God. Being the church in this neighborhood matters. Gathering in this space when it is possible to do so safely matters.

I've been talking about the work we do as a congregation, but I also want to acknowledge the ministry of the church that happens outside of these walls. The work that each one of you does in your homes and in your jobs – whether it's caring for your family or delivering pizzas or nursing a sick person back to health – all of that work is the work of the Body of Christ, because you are Christ's body. God can take the work each one of you does in the name of Jesus Christ and use it to establish the God's Kingdom among us.

Even more than that, the work of God is happening outside of the Christian community. That is the radical message in our Gospel reading. Jesus said, "Whoever is not against us is for us." There are Buddhists, and Jews, and Muslims, and Hindus, and even atheists who are doing the work of God... and they don't even know it. The Holy Spirit cannot be controlled. It will continue to move throughout our world – inspiring and igniting – until the entire world has seen the salvation of God.

So, if you are feeling a bit irritable, like Moses in the wilderness, believing that everything depends on you, relax! You are not alone in your work. God is a very generous delegator. God can work through you, but God can also work through anyone and anything to heal a broken world.