

Gifts Beyond A Manner Accustomed

18th Sun. after Pent. – 09/26/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 29, **“But Moses said to [Joshua], ‘Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit on them!’”**

Introduction

- ⊗ A prospective father-in-law asked his daughter’s nervous boyfriend when he asked for the father’s blessing to pop the question, “Well, how do you plan to support my daughter in the manner to which she has become accustomed?”
 - ➔ Sorority dues, a sporty little car, credit cards at Saks and Macy’s; or Sunday brunch, beer and brats, a certain style of clothing or a particular level of cable and Wi-Fi and technological access – whatever our lifestyle; our standard of living might be, not only do we want to keep it, but most of the time we want more.
 - ➔ Yes, all of us have become quite used to our little luxuries, however big or small they are, and we’d hate to have to become unaccustomed to them, for no other reason than the fact that we don’t like change.
- ⊗ That’s what the people of Israel were facing now that they’d come out of Egypt; even though it was a life of slavery that they didn’t like it either. In this text, the Lord shows Israel and us that by giving them His Spirit, God gives the gift of life well beyond the manner to which we’ve become accustomed – if only we will recognize it and receive it with a godly attitude and sincere intent.

I. We’re accustomed to a certain standard

- ⊗ It’s pretty easy for you and me today, to hear about these people in our Old Testament Reading and quickly point a judgmental finger at them. I mean in verses 1-3, just before our text begins, we’re told that they “complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes”.
 - ➔ We don’t know their specific complaints there, but we can surmise, since they’ve been camped out at the foot of Mt. Sinai for the last year, building the Tabernacle and preparing for a long journey according to all of the LORD’s stipulations, that this way of life was not up to what they had imagined when the LORD brought them out of Egypt; when He saved them from slavery by bringing them through the Red Sea.
 - ➔ Verse one says that the LORD’s “anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp”. They repented of their sin; of their discontent and the LORD’s anger subsided.
- ⊗ Now in the very next verse, this Reading today can easily lead us to question the sincerity of their repentance. They’re already complaining again. “Are these people ever happy?”
 - ➔ While they look back at Egypt and remember the food that they ate and the manner that they lived, it seems they must have forgotten the slavery part; the beatings they received when they did not meet what the slave masters demanded.
 - ➔ Now that the LORD has been providing them with free food – manna every morning and quail every night, they are still not content; they’re bored with the menu and they are “weeping” and whining about it to Moses.
- ⊗ “What a bunch of ungrateful, selfish so and so’s”, right? At least we would never act that way, would we?

- I mean we'd never become bored with the standard of living that God has provided for us would we? We'd never complain that our house is too old or too small to fit our big screen TV or all of our other gadgets and gizmos that we of course "must" have to truly enjoy this earthly life. Or the terrible prices we have to pay so that all we have to do is walk into a grocery store and pick up every kind of fruit and vegetable and meat and treat and supply that you can imagine off of the shelf – just sitting there waiting for us without any effort to grow and raise it or harvest and clean and prepare it for us – man, it's just "terrible" what we have to endure today in this life, isn't it?
- It must be, because our grumbling and complaining is everywhere, in our households, at work, when we get together with friends and neighbors – and yes, even when we gather to receive our Lord's gifts of Word and Sacrament and respond with our praises and prayers in Worship and Bible Study here at church. "The service and hymns and pastor and lessons are boring, too long, not as funny or exciting as You Tube or Netflix or camping or shopping or _____ (you fill in the blank)".
- And never mind that the Almighty Creator of the Ends of the Earth cares enough to personally come right here into our presence and speak to us directly from His inspired Word, and wash us clean in the forgiving water of baptism, and feed us His Son's very body and blood that He sacrificed so that we might be saved from eternal death in hell and live with Him forever in paradise. No, that's not enough. We want more, Lord!
- ✘ It's no wonder that Moses was getting fed up with the task of caring for those grumbling people, even though God Himself had given him that special role. It sounds like even Moses was discontent with this new life as God's prophet.
- You see, Moses had become accustomed to the life of just tending a few sheep in the wilderness. That's what he had done for the last 40 years. But now God has put him in charge of a nation of millions – millions of bleating and grumbling souls. It was more than Moses could bear.
- ✘ What about you? What is it in your life; what special role do you have; that you know the LORD has given to you; that you actually know you've received as a gift, but now it has become, or is becoming a burden for you to carry?
- Is it the burden of being a parent, or caring for a loved one who is ill, or some unique responsibility at work? What are the burdens that have you fatigued and worn out; that are leading you to complain and groan and grumble about?
- ✘ Do you see what Moses did – where he went with his burdens? In verses 10-15 he takes them to the LORD Himself. He unloads on God. Is that alright for us to do that?
- Well, where else do you think the LORD would rather you take your concerns and stresses? Psalm 55:22 says, "Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be moved".
- ✘ In fact we see that God quickly and actively responds to Moses in a very different way than He does to the people. Their grumbling comes against God in a lack of faith and trust, while Moses comes before the LORD in faith and humility.
- So, we're told of God's plan to help Moses; to relieve some of the burden; to share the work load of ministry. More on that later, but first did you see how Joshua responded when his accustomed manner of living is upset?
- He was used to a particular "chain of command" regarding the way that God's Word was proclaimed to the people. God would speak to Moses, and Moses would proclaim God's Word to the people. That was it.

→ Now, when he hears that Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the camp, apart from Moses, he was not okay with that. It was disrespectful to Moses, he believed. I'm sure Joshua meant well, but he was a bit misguided.

✘ So, is it possible that you and I might ever do something like that? Of course! For years perhaps, your group or family or board has operated a particular way. You've become accustomed to that standard, but now someone new comes along with a different idea or a new way of trying to get things done.

→ How do we often respond? Our sinful and selfish instinct is often to dig in our heels and protect our turf, our accustomed way of doing things. We might even become jealous of another person's talents or gifts and become blind to the possibility that this is actually God's gift to help us grow; to protect us or maybe even ease the burden that has been weighing us down.

II. God gives a different manner of life in His Spirit

✘ Yes, that is one of the primary lessons that our LORD seeks to give to us here in this story from Scripture today, that God, in His patient and immeasurable love gives us all a different manner of life by giving us His Spirit.

→ He shows us that life can be quite different from what we have become accustomed to without His Spirit.

✘ Maybe it's best for us first to understand from our text today what God doesn't necessarily give to us in this new life. He doesn't promise to give us better food, a vacation from our duties, or a warm and fuzzy feeling that everything is going to be easy now.

→ The Israelites had Manna every morning and quail every night. Moses still had the role of leading God's people to the Promised Land, but he did now have the help of 70 Spirit-filled men to share the load. They still faced 40 years of wandering through the desert wilderness though.

✘ But with all of that, they did have a greater life and relationship with their Savior and Lord in His Spirit.

→ You see, the Spirit works in ways far beyond what we are accustomed. Moses said in verse 29, "Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit on them!"

→ The same holds true for you and me here today folks. Our life on this globe in the year 2021 is about so much more than what the majority in our world have become accustomed to thinking life is all about.

→ It's much more than eating the best food or having the latest and greatest "things" in our house, in our closet, in our garage or on our phone. We still have work to do; hard work at times. And thinking that your main goal is doing whatever it takes to get recognition or a trophy or a place of power and influence – that's life according to the old earthly way.

✘ No, God shows us an unaccustomed lifestyle; one given to us by the Spirit, whom we confess in the Nicene Creed is the true "Lord and giver of life".

→ That is the life earned for all people when the One who gives the Spirit, the eternal Son of God, laid down His life in our place upon the cross. That right there shows us that this life is not the customary way of life. For our world thinks that we're just plain nuts to think that we receive the greatest possible life ever because someone else lost His life in our place, but that's exactly what Jesus did for Israel, for Moses, for Joshua, for you, for me and for all who, through the Spirit, believe in Him.

III. Life in the Spirit – beyond what we're accustomed

- ⌘ This new life that you and I have in the Spirit of God is the same life poured out upon believers in Christ ever since the Day of Pentecost. What we see in our text with the people of Israel was God's pre-figuring of Pentecost.
 - ➔ And since that day when Jesus' apostles had the Spirit poured out upon them, the Word of Christ's saving death and resurrection has been spreading out to the entire world.
- ⌘ As Moses said, God's Spirit and His gifts of faith and salvation, are not only for one nation, or one group of people, but for "all nations"; all whom He gathers into His body of believers in the "one holy Christian and apostolic Church" (Nicene Creed).
 - ➔ God's Spirit and His life is not limited, as Joshua thought, to only a few select leaders. 1 Timothy 2:4 says that God, "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth".
 - ➔ And so He pours His Spirit out widely; as widely as an ocean splash of grace in His gift of Holy Baptism. It's then that a person enters the Kingdom of God and begins his/her new unaccustomed way of life in Christ.
 - ➔ And it is an entirely new life. As Titus 3:4-7 says, it is "the washing of rebirth in the Holy Spirit".
- ⌘ This Christian life is not what the world thinks it is, as a life of dos and don'ts and "not allowing anyone to have any fun". No, it is life that is so much richer than that to which we were accustomed before we had it.
 - ➔ It's a far greater life than what is found by the ways of this world because in this life we see God and His work not only in the big moments, but in every moment of our existence. Even as we face difficulty and grief and pain and sorrow, we know that God remains our "refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1). Even as powers and authorities and fads and fashions change in the world we know that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8).
 - ➔ When the world's joys and treasures eventually fade and deteriorate; when even our earthly bodies grow old and tired and weak, we know that the life we have in Christ only grows stronger with time. In fact it has no end – it alone is eternal!

Conclusion

- ⌘ So as Moses saw in our Reading today, you and I see as well through God's Spirit alive inside of us and proclaimed and given over and again here in God's Divine Service. Only God, through His Son and by the gift of His Spirit, provides you and me the best life possible today and forever; far beyond the little manner to which we and our world have become accustomed.
 - ➔ He provides all we need and all we want in His Spirit. To Him be all the glory! Amen.