

Sunday, September 26, 2021  
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
Reflections by Juel Pierce

**First Reading**

Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29

*What constitutes legitimate need and legitimate leadership is the focus of this reading. God provides manna in the wilderness, yet the people crave meat. What is truly needful? God bestows the spirit on seventy elders, yet two men not designated as leaders prophesy in the power of God's spirit. What constitutes real leadership?*

<sup>4</sup>The rabble among them had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, "If only we had meat to eat! <sup>5</sup>We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; <sup>6</sup>but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at."

<sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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? <sup>12</sup>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'? <sup>13</sup>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!' <sup>14</sup>I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me. <sup>15</sup>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.”

<sup>16</sup>So the LORD said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tent of meeting, and have them take their place there with you.”

<sup>24</sup>So 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. <sup>25</sup>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 seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again.

<sup>26</sup>Two 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. <sup>27</sup>And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” <sup>28</sup>And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, “My lord Moses, stop them!”

<sup>29</sup>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!”

### **Text Questions**

*What was the problem that the Israelites (or at least “the rabble among them”) complained about? (verses 4-6) What did they think the solution should be to this problem? (verse 5) How did God respond to their complaints? (verse 10) How did Moses respond? (verse 11) Who did Moses blame for the problem? (verses 12-14) What was his solution to his problem? (verse 15) What was God’s solution? (verses 16 & 24-25—see also verses 16-23) What happened to the two elders who remained in the camp? (verse 26) What did Joshua, Moses’s assistant, want to do? (verse*

28) *What did Moses say to Joshua? (verse 29) What do you think it would look like if all God's people spoke for God? Do you ever feel that God is calling you to speak for God?*

### **Psalm 19:7-14**

*The commandment of the LORD gives light to the eyes. (Ps. 19:8)*

<sup>7</sup>The teaching of the LORD is perfect and revives the soul;  
the testimony of the LORD is sure and gives wisdom to the simple.

<sup>8</sup>The statutes of the LORD are just and rejoice the heart;  
the commandment of the LORD is clear and gives light to the eyes.

<sup>9</sup>The fear of the LORD is clean and endures forever;  
the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

<sup>10</sup>More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold,  
sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb.

<sup>11</sup>By them also is your servant enlightened,  
and in keeping them there is great reward.

<sup>12</sup>Who can detect one's own offenses?  
Cleanse me from my secret faults.

<sup>13</sup>Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not get dominion over me;  
then shall I be whole and sound, and innocent of a great offense.

<sup>14</sup>Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight,  
O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.

## **Text Questions**

*This portion of the psalm praises the law of God. What words does the psalmist use to describe the law of God? (verses 7-10) How have you experienced these effects of the law of God? How does the psalmist explain what the law of God does? (verse 11) What happens when someone else tries to warn us of breaking the law of God? (verse 12) What is the psalmist's prayer about those who would make a mockery of those who follow God's law? (verse 13) What does the psalmist teach us in verse 14 about how to pray?*

## **Second Reading**

James 5:13-20

*Marks of the Christian community include praying for those who are sick and in need, celebrating with those in good health, restoring those who have strayed, confessing sins to one another, and offering forgiveness to each other.*

<sup>13</sup>Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup>Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup>The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup>Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. <sup>17</sup>Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. <sup>18</sup>Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

<sup>19</sup>My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders

from the truth and is brought back by another, <sup>20</sup>you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

### **Text Questions**

*James closes this letter/lecture/instruction with advice about how to respond to certain circumstances. What should we do if someone is suffering? (verse 13) If someone is sick? (verse 14) Why should the "elders" (faithful believers) be called? (verse 15) How does James say that illness and sin are related? (verse 16) James uses Elijah as an example of someone's faithful prayer. (verses 17-18) If you can't remember this story, read it in 1 Kings 17-19. What does James say is our responsibility to one another, especially if someone "wanders" from it? (verses 19-20) Note that doing so not only saves the person who wanders, it also benefits the person who calls them back. Have you ever had this experience?*

### **Gospel**

Mark 9:38-50

*On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus teaches his disciples about ministry that involves service and sacrifice. His disciples are slow to realize that these words apply to them as well as to others.*

<sup>38</sup>John said to [Jesus,] "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." <sup>39</sup>But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. <sup>40</sup>Whoever is not against us is for us. <sup>41</sup>For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no

means lose the reward.

<sup>42</sup>“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. <sup>43</sup>If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. <sup>45</sup>And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. <sup>47</sup>And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, <sup>48</sup>where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

<sup>49</sup>“For everyone will be salted with fire. <sup>50</sup>Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

### **Text Questions**

*What was John concerned about in this text? (verse 38) How did Jesus respond to him? (verse 39) What does Jesus say about those who do good things in his name? (verses 39-40) What does Jesus say about someone who cares for one of his disciples? (verse 41) This discussion brings to my mind what I sometimes think about other Christians who follow Jesus, just not exactly the way I do. What would Jesus say to me if I was upset about them? What does Jesus say about someone who puts a “stumbling block” in the way of a believer? (verse 42) In verses 42-48, Jesus is using hyperbole—exaggerating to make a point. What do you think he is saying? Can we really cause ourselves to sin? I remember a children’s song I learned in Sunday School: “Be careful, little eyes, what you see...little ears, what you hear...little feet, where you walk...little hands, what you do” because God looks at you (always) with love, and you don’t want to disappoint Jesus!*

*Maybe not the best song for little children, who often are just learning the faith and can't always discern whether what they are doing is sinful. But perhaps we adults should remember this. What do you think? I'm not sure what it means that "everyone will be salted with fire" (verse 49), or how salt can lose its saltiness. (verse 50) But what Jesus wants is for us to be at peace with one another, without losing our faith—that I'm sure of.*