

**September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

**Year B; 18<sup>th</sup> Pentecost**

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

**Psalms 19: 7-14**

**Mark 9: 38-50**

***In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.***

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

*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."*

*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."*

*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."*

*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. 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.*

*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. And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, "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!"*

With the weather change this week, I have, of course, noticed the deep joy of cool overnight and morning temperatures, the sweet blue skies, and the delight of breezes, but as I walked in the early morning, enjoying all of these things, I also noticed the quiet, the silence really.

With the weather change the dawn seems quieter, a silence settling comfortably over my morning walk. Maybe it has to do with the humidity lowering, maybe the barometric pressure, or maybe it is all in my head, but I keep noticing it, on my early walks and also as darkness falls, and that full moon came up this week, and the stars are so clear.....cool air and so quiet.

I had one day this week that held four meetings, that totaled seven and a half hours of straight talking in my day. My brain was exhausted and I felt covered in words!

Now don't get me wrong, all four of these meetings were meaningful, helpful and good, but I was out of words when the last one ended at 8:15pm.

Tim asked me how the last one went, and I said I'd have to tell him in the morning, after my words had re-charged a bit!

Quiet, silence, are precious gifts in my life, and perhaps in yours.

God is of course everywhere in our lives, but for some, especially in the

silence.

God in the sheer silence, the still small voice, the nudge.

In our passage from Numbers, the Israelites are complaining, again, and there is seemingly no quiet among them, only more grumbling, more drama, and a dangerous nostalgia for the old days.

The passage opens noting that:

*“The rabble among them had a strong craving....”*

Rabble, meaning a mob, a noisy mob with a craving, who are demanding and rude and will stop at nothing to get their craving satisfied. The rabble fire up everyone to demand meat. They are not satisfied with the miraculous manna that God sends each evening, they want meat.

The people indulge in dangerous nostalgia, yearning for those old days in Egypt where they ate meat and fish, cucumbers and onions! Forgetting, as nostalgia always requires, that they had been enslaved in Egypt, and ate only if their enslavers allowed them to do so.

And Moses hears the complaints, and he is fed up, ready to quit. So, Moses tells the Lord he is done, drained, feeling like he has been carrying the people like a nursing mother, finally saying:

*“I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me.”*

As happens so many times, I am startled to hear in these ancient texts, fresh words of 2021.

I talk to many colleagues and friends, and they feel like Moses, drained, burned out by their work in churches through this ongoing pandemic. And across the country, priests and ministers are leaving the ministry.

Let me hasten to say, I am not burned out like my colleagues, I am tired, but definitely not burned out. I am in fact, hopeful and curious about where both churches are heading in the next year.

Part of the reason I am not, like so many of my colleagues, burned out, is because of the solution that God offers to Moses:

Share the burden, carry the weight not alone, but with others.

SMWC and Trinity might not have the 70 elders of Israel, but we do have amazing folks on the Vestries of the two churches!

God's help to Moses is simple but too often forgotten, carry the weight together, and as the text tells us:

*"...(God) took some of the spirit that was on (Moses) and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied."*

Ministry in which we share the vision, the weight, the tasks, and the joy and satisfaction of ministry well done, is ministry that can be sustained, and that can grow. And too where we ponder together, where in the world God is calling us.

If this is starting to sound like a typical October sermon, heading to a glorious conclusion about Vestry elections and Stewardship campaigns,

think again!

This is a sermon about that silence I described at the start of this sermon.

I know I have told you all before my lack of success in sitting quietly in silent prayer.

If I sit alone and pray in silence, I get drowsy and can even move on to snoring.

But I know I do better in silent prayer when I am on my morning walk, AND, when I pray with others.

We have a new form for our Prayers of the People today that includes not responses for the congregation, but time for silent prayer.

We have much on our hearts and that we yearn to bring to God. Last Sunday, after my sermon on the refugees, the children and strangers from Afghanistan, Jane Henley was doing the Prayers of the People and spontaneously added her own anguished prayer for the Haitian refugees at the US border.

With our new Prayer Form today I ask our readers to leave some time for quiet, for silence after each prayer, for us to bring our hearts to God. And please know if you feel nudged to offer a name or concern out loud that is fine, but silence is just as good; God hears us pray. Most of all, I hope for us to be together in prayer, lifting our hearts and burdens and hopes to God.

And ok, it is almost October, so I do ask you, if God speaks to you in the silence, if you feel a quiet nudge to be a part of looking to the future for the

churches, to ponder together where in the world God is calling us, to simply listen.

I'll end with a passage we heard several weeks ago from 1 Kings, when the prophet Elijah was fleeing the wrath of Jezebel; he is exhausted and afraid and feels so alone.

And God says to him:

*“Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.*

*When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”*

May we listen together to the sheer silence of our God.

Amen.