

**Sermon Notes:** September 29, 2024

**Focus:** Would that all the Lord's people were prophets

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My focus today comes from the end of the Old Testament reading (Numbers 11). Moses oversees leading the people through the wilderness. Some hate this and some want to make Moses even more powerful. In Chapter 11, a few affronted people had heard “non-authorized” prophecy, and they were eager for Moses to know it. They were convinced that Moses could put a stop to all this extra Mosaic nonsense. His response “would that all the Lord's people were prophets.” A version of that prayer has been a long-standing prayer of mine too.

I *don't* aspire to the role of prophet. I *do* long for each of you to find your voice in the realm of your faith. You can find your voice at St. Timothy's as well as in the communities you serve. My mosaic style prayer is ‘O that each of you would find your voice. O that each of you would serve the places you live with joy and dignity.’

*Trivia moment:* the Numbers reading shows up twice this year in this lectionary cycle. It shows up once today as well as in a few months for Pentecost Sunday (one option among several). Do you know a 3<sup>rd</sup> time Numbers 11 is a reading option? Hint, it only happens as needed, not regularly. If you don't know and don't want to bother looking it up - I'll tell you at the sermon.

I really enjoy reading a paraphrase of the Bible called “The Message.” And its description of 1 Corinthians is a nice supplement to Moses' Numbers 11 prayer:

*1 Corinthians 12 (Version: The Message)* You are Christ's body—that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your “part” mean anything. You're familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in his church, which is his “body”: apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, helpers, organizers, those who pray in tongues. But it's obvious by now, isn't it, that Christ's church is a complete Body and not a gigantic, unidimensional Part? It's not all Apostle, not all Prophet, not all Miracle Worker, not all Healer, not all Prayer in Tongues, not all Interpreter of Tongues. And yet some of you keep competing for so-called “important” parts.

This text is a long-winded way of saying that we are in this together and help each other out. We do this each in our own unique and collaborative way. <sup>1</sup> Corinthians was focused on what was going on inside of the “church walls,” but this could be equally applied to any community you serve. I want to share one last scripture that is related to this theme of shared leadership.

Romans 12: 4-8 (Version: The Message) In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we? ... let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't. If you

preach, just preach God's Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don't get bossy; if you're put in charge, don't manipulate; if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with the disadvantaged, don't let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them. Keep a smile on your face.

When we are working at our best, each gift is life giving, honored, and essential to a well-functioning community. Your clergy and staff cannot embody all the gifts of community, you will find disillusionment and disappointment if you think we do. 'O that each of you would be encouraged, lifted up, and celebrated for how you make the world a better place.'

**Back to the book of Number aka In the Wilderness** the title of the Book of Numbers is alternately titled *In The Wilderness*. Broadly, you can think of Numbers as three wilderness stories with two travel logs in between.

- 1<sup>st</sup> wilderness section chapters 1-10  
Moses came down from Sinai with 10 Commandments  
In this section, we have the first count, census, of the people and listing of all the regiments of the tribes.
- 1<sup>st</sup> travel log chapters 11-12  
Getting to Paran
- 2<sup>nd</sup> wilderness section chapters 13-19  
They could have entered the promised land quickly, but they chose to shrink in fear.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> travel log chapters 20-21  
Getting to Moab
- 3<sup>rd</sup> wilderness section – chapters 22-36  
In Moab is the biggest section. It includes the second census. There are instructions about how to settle in Cana and the book ends with a new generation on the verge of entering the Promised Land

**Throughout the Book** there is this very pressing question about who is in charge, who is appointed to lead, and who decides which way to go. Moses never quite lands on an enduring answer. Sometimes he thinks "everybody is great" and sometimes he swerves into "I must clean house." Either way, I believe at his core he longs for the people to be rowing in the same way, not micromanaging everything. He longs to share the work of leadership. He longs that 'all the Lord's people were prophets.' My prayers are nearly identical as we move into stewardship season. 'O that all the Lord's people were prophets, apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, helpers, organizers, and advocates.'

May your staff and clergy be your cheerleaders. We are great with poms poms. Ask us how we can help empower your ministry, amplify your voice, and celebrate your advocacy. We will accomplish great things this year. **Todd**