

June 4, 2017, Day of Pentecost

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**Focus:** The Holy Spirit won't stop working.

The story from the book of Numbers today is one of my favorites because I think everyone can relate to Eldad and Medad. Moses, who's acted as sort of a judge and a leader, not only speaking the word of God himself to all the Israelites in the wilderness, but having to decide every petty squabble that comes up, is understandably tired. Leading a people like this in the wilderness for forty years is hard and tiring work. So he takes seventy of the elders and sets them up as a sort of deputies. He takes them outside the camp, God's Spirit rests upon them, and boom, they begin prophesying. The system seems to be working.

Only two people didn't get the memo: Eldad and Medad. They're not among the seventy; they stay *inside* the encampment and then they begin prophesying. Now, you might think that this sounds great. There's a ton of work to go around for everyone. They can stay inside the camp and prophesy to people there while the seventy are working outside. And besides, let's not forget: our story says that the Spirit also rested on Eldad and Medad.

All seems to be working, until... "ELDAD AND MEDAD ARE PROPHECYING IN THE CAMP!" I remember when this used to happen in grade school. A gasp goes through the room as everyone waits to see how the teacher will respond to this brazen breaking of the rules. And then you get the classic teacher's pet, Joshua who sees himself as Moses's hand-selected #2 who says, "My Lord, stop them!" I was amused to read in Hebrew what he says is actually more like, "My Lord, SHUT THEM UP!"

*My Lord, Shut Them Up!*

Well, believe it or not, I can relate to that. And probably all of you can, too. Now oftentimes people aren't so forthright. Oftentimes, it will come down to who is invited to the table when decisions are made. Whose advice is taken. Who is listened to when they speak up at the meeting and who is ignored. Who is chosen every time a committee or a ministry team needs someone to do something and who's not even thought about. Whose work is recognized and whose work is ignored. Who we think might have something to offer and who, well, just needs to be shut up.

Whenever an Eldad or a Medad has something to say, there is always someone who makes it their life's mission to make sure they don't get heard. Someone like the youth in our story who just enjoys ruining the fun for everyone else. Or someone like Joshua who feels that his special status is threatened by other people speaking up *My Lord, Shut Them Up!*

I am bringing this up because in a few minutes, we are going to confirm three new members of our congregation: Zach, Luke, and Drew. No offense to them, but probably when you think of the leaders of the congregation, you don't think of them right away. You might think of our council or of the leaders of our women's group or of our choir or maybe the pastor.

These groups of people usually have one of two advantages. #1: In the case of the council or of the pastor, they have formal authority. There are roles and tasks that constitutionally and legally

we must perform. When we stay in that area, our leadership's usually recognized. On the other hand, there's another type of leadership that is less formal. People who have been here in some cases since the church was built, who have been here through the ups and downs, who have lots of expertise and lots of trust from long-standing relationships. They also have a lot of leadership and what they say carries a lot of weight.

In some ways, you could say that the folks in these groups are our seventy sent outside the camp. These are the people whom we usually go to first when we are looking for someone to fill a ministry team or when a decision has to be made or a matter has to be settled or when a budget is being put together or when we're choosing colors for the lunch afterwards today. As a church, we trust that the Holy Spirit is at work here among these people as we pray and ask for direction and make decisions that will help us prophesy to Jefferson County and the world about what God has done for us.

That set-up is pretty typical not just for Resurrection, but for any church. And things work well as long as people know their roles and stick to them. But every so often it happens that someone who's not one of these people tries to come up with a new idea or to share their gifts or ministry or to prophesy about what they think God's plans for us are. Someone, like maybe a visitor, or a new member, or someone who's been here less than a decade, or say, maybe even someone we can remember when they were baptized as babies and now they're confirmed and things get shaken up. Things get shaken up when we realize *they want to not only share their gifts but help decide things at this church, too?* One or three of them come along. And too often in many places, they are told, in so many words, "My Lord, shut them up!"

Well, if you have ever been told that, whether that's outside or even here in this church, if you have ever felt like Eldad or Medad, there is Good News for you today. And it's this: The Holy Spirit will not be shut up. The Holy Spirit will not stop working. The Holy Spirit will not stop shaking things up. The Holy Spirit will not stop prophesying. And the Holy Spirit will not stop using your gifts for God's work in the world.

In our story today, Moses as God's *prophet extraordinaire*: his hand-picked representative on earth to the people of Israel: Moses had every opportunity to shoot down Eldad and Medad, these young whippersnappers. He could have said, "you're in the wrong place," "you're not qualified," "come back in a couple years when you're a little bit older or when you have a little more experience," "who do you think you are?" or even just, "*Shut Up!*" But Moses didn't. Instead, he said, "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!"

Friends, that has happened. And I'm not even talking about today with confirmation. I'm talking about the first Day of Pentecost. On Pentecost, God gave the Holy Spirit to all the people. The same Spirit that brooded over the waters at creation, the same Spirit that spoke through Moses and the prophets, the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, the same Spirit that caused simple Galilean fishermen to be understood by Asians and Parthians.

Today, Luke, Drew, and Zach, by the power of that same Spirit will affirm the Spirit's work in their lives. They'll affirm the Spirit that fulfills the promises of their baptism: the Spirit that brings together God's faithful people, that allows them to hear the Word of God and share in the Lord's Supper, and the Spirit who calls and empowers them to proclaim the Good News of

Christ through word and deed, to serve all people following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth, or in other words to prophesy about what God is doing in the world. They can do this, not just because they're good young men—although I know that they are—but because God's Spirit has rested on them. And as they've grown up in this congregation the past decade and a half, you have seen their gifts for leadership in this church and the community. You have seen their compassion, their work ethic, their intelligence, and yes, I have to say, their *competitiveness*, too. Today, as they confirm the Spirit's work in them, we can confirm ourselves that the prayer of Moses continues to be fulfilled and *in our midst*, the Lord is sending his people prophets in his Spirit.

I mean that: Gentlemen, we need your gifts: your leadership, your voice, the work God's doing in you, not because "you are the church of the future," but because you and God's work in your lives are a key, *essential* part of this church now. Today.

But that work didn't begin today. God's work in you began years ago when you were baptized. That's why we call it "Affirmation of Baptism." When you were baptized in what seems a while ago for you and maybe not so long ago for your parents and friends, you received the Holy Spirit. And all of the rest of you in this congregation have, too. From the eldest of the seventy elders among us down to Wyatt.

Today we give thanks to God for three prophets among us. And we give thanks for all of our prophetic, Spirit-filled work. We are called and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be God's hands doing God's work in the world, and to be a voice for the voiceless. And in the Spirit's mission, the watchword is never "shut up," but *rise up*. *Rise up, o saints of God!* Live out your baptismal call! Speak up! Act out for love and justice! And prophesy! **Amen.**