

Chosen and Equipped to Serve 2020
Numbers 27:15-23 Matthew 9:35-38

Numbers 27:15-23 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹⁵Moses spoke to the Lord, saying, ¹⁶“Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint someone over the congregation ¹⁷who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep without a shepherd.” ¹⁸So the Lord said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him; ¹⁹have him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and commission him in their sight. ²⁰You shall give him some of your authority, so that all the congregation of the Israelites may obey. ²¹But he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the decision of the Urim before the Lord; at his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the Israelites with him, the whole congregation.” ²²So Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole congregation; ²³he laid his hands on him and commissioned him—as the Lord had directed through Moses.

Matthew 9:35-39 (New Revised Standard Version)

³⁵Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

When I was a younger man, a new pastor fresh out of seminary,
many of the elders on Session had decades of church experience,
and had served on the Session of several Presbyt. churches.
They were a blessing & gift to me, a resource that I learned to trust
and rely on for their wise council and seasoned judgement.

Later, it was time for several of them to rotate off the Session,
and I was more than a bit concerned and apprehensive,
and not quite sure how well or effectively
the Session would lead the church without them.

But as it turned out when the new church officers came on board,
they brought with them a unique offering of gifts,
fresh energy and a wonderful array of innovative ideas.

Somehow God manages to call and equip church leaders,
just when their particular gifts and abilities are most needed,
so that the church can continue to serve God faithfully
and fulfill its mission whatever else is happening.

The passage from Numbers is also about leadership transition.

The descendants of the people liberated from Egyptian slavery

are at the edge of the Promised Land and preparing to go in,
but Moses won't be leading them as they enter.

Try to imagine what that might have felt like.

It was Moses who had stood before the mighty ruler, Pharaoh,
and demanded liberation: God commands you, let my people go.
Moses had called down the plagues that demonstrated God's power,
against which Pharaoh and his Egyptian gods could not prevail.

High atop Mt. Sinai, in the very presence of Almighty God,
Moses had received the Ten Commandments on stone tablets,
and faithfully led the people for 40 years in the wilderness.

That generation had all been born during the wilderness journey.
They have only known Moses as their leader & spokesman for God,
who has attended to their needs, both physical and spiritual.

But now, Moses won't be there to follow and rely upon.

He can't go with them and so, as we read in vs. 15~17

Moses spoke to the Lord, saying, "Let the Lord appoint someone over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep without a shepherd."

And as it turned out, **God already had that covered.**

Joshua had already demonstrated his trust and confidence in God,
so it was really just a matter of confirming God's call, vs. 18-20

So the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him; have him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and commission him in their sight. You shall give him some of your authority, so that all the congregation of the Israelites may obey.

40 years earlier, their first time they came near the Promised Land,

Moses had sent out twelve men to spy and check out the land.

Ten of them returned fearful, insisting that even with God's help,
it would not be possible to conquer the land God had promised them.

Their fear convinced the people to rebel against God and Moses,
and complain that it had been a terrible mistake to leave Egypt...
... and so God declared,
none of that generation would enter the Promised Land.

But two of the spies sent by Moses, Joshua and Caleb
did trust God and urged, let's to move in immediately
and see how God will accomplish the victory.

They had no doubt that God would fulfill his word as promised.

And by that, Joshua demonstrated the kind of leadership God wanted.

Therefore, so after Moses,
Joshua would lead the people to conquer the land...
... and so that they would not be like sheep without a shepherd.

That image or metaphor, like sheep without a shepherd
was also frequently used by several Old Testament prophets,
to describe many of the failed leaders of Israel
who had not been obedient or faithful to the Lord God.

Those false leaders betrayed God's call and the people's trust,
and so the nation suffered as they wandered away from God...
... like sheep without a shepherd.

When Matthew uses that same phrase, like sheep without a shepherd
he is drawing from that same Old Testament image or metaphor,
**connecting the failed and unfaithful leaders of the OT
to the scribes and Pharisees in conflict against Jesus.**

Like bad shepherds, they weren't caring for the people of God,
and had no compassion for the lost, the outcast and struggling,
rejecting & excluding them from the hope & promises of God.

Listen to how Jesus describes them in Matthew 23:1~4, 13

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees ... they do not practice what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. ... But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew highlights the stark contrast between Jesus
and the self-serving and hypocritical religious leaders, vs. 35-36

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Matthew is how the life and ministry and mission of Jesus
was fulfilling of God's promises throughout the Old Test.,
and that Jesus Christ truly was the good shepherd being opposed
by the religious leaders, who lacked compassion for God's people.

The call to action comes in the next verses, vs. 37-38

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

In the following passage that begins the next chapter,
Jesus will send out the 12 disciples

with authority to preach, teach and heal,
and to announce and proclaim the coming Kingdom of God...

... which also connects with the end of Matthew's Gospel, (Mat. 28:18-19)

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

Here, Jesus was about the ascend to the Father,
when he give his disciples The Great Commission,
passing some of his authority to the disciples,
to lead and care for the community of believers,
much like Moses passing authority to Joshua in Numbers,
so that the people are not like sheep without a shepherd.

So how does all that connect and relate to do with us today?

Last week our Session finished putting together
our church officer nominating committee for this year,
which was a challenge, complicated by the Corona-virus.

The faithfulness and the work of that nominating committee
is most crucial to the life and mission of this church.

They are charged to discern the voice and call of the Holy Spirit,
and then, place the names of church members into nomination,
those whom they believe that God has called and equipped
to serve as our church officers, elders and deacons...

... and the faithfulness and effectiveness of the Session and deacons
will depend on those nominations & who our congregation elects...
... on whether or not we have truly listened to the Holy Spirit.

I cannot overemphasize how important this is,
especially amid all the disruption & confusion these days,
for clearly these are not easy times for the people of God.

The nominating committee will begin their work of discerning soon,
therefore I am asking that each one of us, that is all of us,
please pray diligently for them all through the process---

- that they will listen and heed the Holy Spirit's guidance,
and that if you are invited to serve as a church officer,
that you will consider your call carefully & prayerfully.

I hope over these next months you will pray for each of them by name,
Janet Green and Dina Schroeder from the Session, Dale Cook from

the deacons, Janice Sherman, Blaine Goss
and Steve Loman from the congregation at large.

The question of leadership & call is an important one to us, & to God,
for the quality and faithfulness of church leadership
certainly influences the spiritual welfare of God's people.

However, **ministry is not about just elders, deacons and pastors,**
for we are all, each one called and equipped by God
to grow in our faith by serving the Lord usefully,
by allowing the grace and compassion of God
to flow through us freely out into the world...
... so that our thoughts, words and deeds actually do make a difference.

Whoever we are, whatever our situation in life
there is always some way that we can live out our faith.

You don't have to be very strong or vigorous to pray well,
to send a hopeful and encouraging note or email,
or the brighten someone's day with a phone call.

To follow Jesus, means active faith, generosity and compassion.

Years ago I read a remarkable quote from Billy Graham,
as he reflected back on his life of faith and ministry.
He said, *"I had thought my job was to bring people to God,
but maybe my job really was to bring Christians to Jesus."*

That is a starting statement for a traveling evangelist to make.

That represents a significant shift in emphasis
beyond just making a one-time public profession of faith
toward seeking and trying to develop
an authentic and growing relationship of faith.

Meaning, it's not enough to just get in through the gates of Heaven -
but rather, it means going further, growing further,
and continuing to deepen our faith-walk toward Jesus,
even as a born-again Christian believer, a disciple.

Beyond simply becoming a Christian, it is seeking to live
a faithful Christian life by being active and productive,
so that we are **all** serving usefully in the Kingdom of God.

Beyond simply continuing to be a Christian each day,
**I hope that my faith is deeper today than it was yesterday,
though not as deep and faithful as I hope it will be tomorrow...**

... and that means that I am trying to walk ever closer more faithfully-

I am studying my Bible. I am praying and meditating.
I am in fellowship with other Christian believers.
**I am trying to use my life, my time and resources to serve well,
so that my life and interactions do proclaim the Good News.**

I believe that is our call and challenge today,
especially amid all the turmoil, disruption, isolation and fear,
to follow the example of Jesus, to look at **all** other people
with compassion, even those with whom we disagree. vs. 36
When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like
sheep without a shepherd.

Our hope is that through all things, we do trust that God is with us,
and that by the Creator's power, will and design,
God is still accomplishing his gracious and saving purpose.

**And the Lord will use and transform even the destruction around us,
to bring blessings, peace and justice, overcoming evil and turmoil.**

God's purpose is grace, to heal human sin, strife and brokenness,
to further our spiritual development, **for us to grow closer to God
by deepening and improving our walk of faith with Jesus Christ...**

... and by recognizing our unique place and purpose within God's plan.

**Whatever our situation or circumstance, tribulation, worry or fear
our call is to live in hope, trust and faithfully serve well
along whatever journey the Lord has laid out before us.**

Fellow laborers, we are each one of us
blested & equipped by God to make a difference in this world,
and that we can have a positive influence toward good...
... and sometimes God answers our prayer by putting us to work,

perhaps to strengthen or encourage someone's journey of faith,
or to let grace, patience and compassion soften a conflict,
to proclaim God's relentless love to the discouraged and beaten.

So starting at home, and spreading to ALL the people we encounter,
is God made visible by my words, my deeds and my attitude?

Jesus called it this way, Matthew 5:14-16

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it
under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your
light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."