Numbers 11:24-30

24 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.

25 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.

26 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.

27 And a young man ran and told Moses,
'Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.'

28 And Joshua son of Nun,
the assistant of Moses,
one of his chosen men,
said, 'My lord Moses, stop them!'

29 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!'

30 And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

John 7:37-39

37 On the last day
of the festival,
the great day,
while Jesus was standing there,
he cried out,

'Let anyone
who is thirsty
come to me,

38 and let the one
who believes in me
drink.

As the scripture has said,

"Out of the believer's heart
shall flow rivers
of living water." '

39 Now he said this
about the Spirit,

which believers
in him
were to receive;

for as yet
there was
no Spirit,

because Jesus
was not yet
glorified.

Reading Ahead for 'Pentecostal Communion' This Week

The Great Fifty Days of Easter culminates on Pentecost
After a season of resurrection appearances,
Luke and Acts report ascension (at different times)
as we celebrated last Sunday with the whole church

We've heard a lot from Acts and John in this year's lectionary
Particularly from Acts 2 and John 20, again slated for this week,
perhaps too familiar to good United Churches on Pentecost.
So let's hear the alternates at Trinity Annan
(and by agreement, Central Westside will listen in online)

What's the movie in your head for the 'gift of the Holy Spirit'?
The imagery of 'tongues of flame and rushing wind' in Acts 2?
Dispirited disciples empowered to babble in others' languages?

Perhaps you've got images of the church in Corinth –
many gifts, one spirit, healthy tension, open conflict
or bloody Jesus breathing on disciples in the locked room,
tying the gift to forgiving and retaining sins

We've heard all those already in 2 years together –
God willing, we'll hear them again, with the wider church
but let's try Numbers 11 and John 7 this time,
even if it won't echo as many of our neighbour churches!

When I was ordained 40 years ago,
our congregation in was not just interdenominational –
we had a healthy 'charismatic' wing of 'Spirit-filled' members
(glib liberals often confuse 'Pentecostal' with 'fundamentalist',
sitting outside the 'evangelical' circles of 2023)

Thank God for the many evangelical churches around here –
God forbid we simply duplicate their witness, weakly
distorting the legacy entrusted to us as UCC folk!

Reading Numbers This Week

Here's a nugget of a story – a great film clip –
unless you've never seen the whole movie!

Numbers, named for the census lists of names,
Bemidbar or 'wandering' in older traditions,
is the 4th book of Torah (can you rattle off all 5?)

Maybe you recognize Charlton Heston as Moses,
in Cecil B. DeMille's 1956 'Ten Commandments' movie,
a dominant visualization of Exodus

Numbers, like Deuteronomy, is like a 'remake' of Exodus,
by a different producer/director team with its own agenda,
its own points of view to emphasize

Last year at this time, I posted Numbers, 'a chapter a day'
here are links to chapter 11, 'Whiners', with digital audio:
http://www.hereticslikeus.com/2022/05/whiners-numbers-11.html
https://spotifyanchor-web.app.link/e/XyrHaxvs2zb

The riff-raff are complaining in the desert to Moses,
and Moses is complaining about them to God –
sick of manna, they want meat, for 600K+ of them
God scolds 'I'll show them – and you!'

The dominant tradition (Ex 35) has Moses' face glow,
when we came out of the tent of presence,
into the bigger tent courtyards

The dominant tradition (Ex 18) and in trips up Sinai,
has Moses delegate to 70 elders,
or invite them near the mountain

Here, 70 elders are gathered around the tent of presence,
God holds back a bit from Moses, for them –
though it doesn't 'take' for long

Meanwhile – and ongoing -
back in the many tents of the 600K+ people,
Eldad and Medad, 'prophesying'

Were Eldad and Medad 2 of the 70?
Did they just miss the meeting,
or did they return to home tents and prophesy longer?

Abraham ibn Ezra, great commentator 1000 years ago,
concluded that Eldad and Medad never went to the tent,
but stayed in the camp with everybody else

One tattletale 'lad' rats out Eldad and Medad
telling 'the powers that be', Moses and the 70 –
Joshua, an aide (bigger in Deuteronomy) wants scolding

The nugget of this tale is about legitimacy and authority,
top-down hierarchy, or bubbling-up spontaneity,
delegation beyond one-man leadership

On this Pentecost, WOWRC AGM meeting,
Where do you fit in the Numbers picture –
reacting to Eldad and Medad voices in the camp?

The 600K+ people are in tents by clans,
wandering in the desert, whining,
missing the 'good old days' of slavery in Egypt

Even the leader(s) are whining,
managing the expectations of people,
and trying on fleeting inspiration of the 70

Next – God nearly suffocates them with quail,
too many to eat, till they are sick of the taste –
be careful for what you pray for – you might get it!

Reading the Gospel This Week

This alternate gospel is mercifully, deceptively brief
again, assuming that you've seen the whole movie!

We're back in the 'book of signs', front half of John,
festival trips to Jerusalem, trumping old signs with new:
this time, Sukkot, 'Booths', harvest recalling desert wandering

John's Jesus resists going to the festival, then covertly goes
argues with *Judaios*, then Pharisees, chief priests, temple police
culminating in this public invitation

As usual, warning: don't conflate 'Jews' in anti-Semitic reading
the conflict is complex, not binary, polarizing, demonizing
all told from a post resurrection, post-temple point of view

In John 4, Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well
and this theme of Jesus as source and conduit of water
to meet thirst better than the old ways…

This summary cites 'the scripture':
e.g. Isaiah 44:3, 58:11, Proverbs 18:4
the imagery fits Sukkot prayers for winter rain for fields

On this Pentecostal Communion Sunday,
what's your thirst,
and does the communion cup do it for you?

Was Jesus rejecting organized religious traditions,
and offering a spontaneous charismatic alternative?
He sure wasn't a Christian, rejecting Judaism!

How many song lyrics can you recall about thirst and water?