

# **Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**ARE YOU FEELING OVERWHELMED?**

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

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**Analysis by Bill White**

The rabble among them had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, "If only we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; 6 but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at."

10 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. 11 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? 12 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? 13 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!' 14 I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me. 15 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."

16 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.

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!"

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Overwhelmed**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *I can't do it anymore.*

Once again God's people are complaining. Now they are sick and tired of the same menu, the same ol' manna from heaven. Now they want meat to eat. But not just meat; they also want the rich variety of foods they had back in Egypt. In light of this latest murmuring and complaining, Moses has had it. Moses is overwhelmed and he protests to God saying in effect, "I just can't take this anymore! I can't do it anymore! The tasks you have tasked me with are too great! The burden is too heavy!"

Do we ever feel overwhelmed by the tasks God has called us to?

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** : *I don't believe God can handle it.*

Even worse, it is apparent that Moses does not believe God can handle the situation either. The burden of carrying these people and leading these people is too great. Moses must believe all this is too much even for God to handle, otherwise he would be going to God for help, trusting God will provide the solution. But no. Moses himself is whining and complaining, hopeless and faithless. Note also here the omitted verses 17-23.

Do we ever feel the tasks before us are too great even for God to handle?

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** : *I give up.*

Worse still, in his faithlessness Moses is despondent and fatalistic. He wants to give up and just die. He says in effect, "God, please, just take my life now and put me out of my misery" (v. 15).

Do we ever want to just give up, give up even our faith? (See an example of this in American Lutheran Publicity Bureau's *Forum Letter* article, "To whom can we go?" in the September 2012 issue.)

## **PROGNOSIS: Overpowered**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *God doesn't give up.*

God is not a God who reacts, but the God who acts. God acts according to his will, plans, power, and grace. Once again God's gracious care comes even to those who continually murmur, complain and revolt. In spite of the circumstances, God graciously instructs Moses to gather seventy elders and God will come to them and once again give them what they really need. "I will come down and talk with you there..." (v. 17). God will overpower that which has overwhelmed them.

God's greatest act was to "come down" to us in the person of Jesus Christ, who at the cross overcame the power of those forces and voices that would move us to fatalistic despair. By his death and glorious resurrection Jesus defeated for all time the power of sin, evil and death. The resurrected and ascended Lord Jesus sends his equipping and empowering Holy Spirit to "come down" to all who "complain" to God that they can't take it anymore and want to give up.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** : *I believe God is able.*

As God had instructed him, Moses calls the elders together and they do indeed receive God's spirit, God's equipping and sustaining power (vv. 24-25).

In much the same way, the Holy Spirit "comes down" calling us to come together in the community of believers for worship and there, through Word and sacrament, we receive God's power. Through Word and sacrament, Jesus takes away our "weak faith" or our "no faith" and exchanges it for true faith, true faith which sustains us and renews us in those times when we've had it and just can't take it anymore. This is faith that assures us there is no task before us that is too great for God to handle.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution)** : *God chooses to act through us.*

And the manner by which God often handles seemingly overwhelming tasks is through people! "... and I will take some of the spirit that is on you and put it on them; and they shall bear the burden of the people along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself (again, v. 17). Holy Smoke, what a theophany! God comes down in a cloud and his Spirit empowers the elders to do their various tasks.

So also for us. The same faith in Christ that enables us to

believe there is no task or calling from God too big for us to handle empowers us to endure, to overcome feelings of being overwhelmed, helplessness, hopelessness, and despair. This trust in Christ enables us to see God's help and to receive it, to "keep the faith" even in the most overwhelming of circumstances.