

Pentecost A, 2017
Church of the Holy Trinity

I have always loved the story about Eldad and Medad. Once upon a time, long, long ago, the people of God were saved from being slaves in Egypt. They had come to Egypt looking for food when there was no rain and all of their crops had failed. The Egyptians had been storing up food just in case such a year might come, so they had plenty of food for everyone. But the Egyptians were not very nice to the foreigners who came to their country. The powerful Egyptian king, (the Egyptians called their kings “Pharaohs,”) the Pharaoh, made the foreigners into slaves and forced them to build some of the big Pyramids which you can see to this day if you visit Egypt. It was very hard work building those big triangular monuments out of huge stones which often had to be hauled for miles.

The people of Israel, God’s people who had been turned into these slaves, cried out to God. They prayed every day that they might be set free so that they could go back to their own country again. In their own country they could be free again, and would not have to build someone else’s big buildings. God heard their prayers and God saw that they needed a leader to help them escape the powerful Egyptians. God appeared to Moses one day, disguised as a burning bush to get his attention. Moses stopped what he was doing and looked at the bush, and while he stood there God spoke to him. God told him what to do to rescue the people of Israel and get them out of Egypt. This was going to be a big job. Moses was not sure he could do it. So God sent the Holy Spirit to be with Moses. God gave Moses very specific instructions about how he could free the people and the Holy Spirit gave Moses the courage he needed to follow those instructions and get the job done.

Every year at the Easter Vigil, we read about how Moses got the people of Israel out of Egypt by parting the waters of the Red Sea so that they could walk across to the other side safely,

then letting the water flow back down into the sea, which kept the Egyptians from chasing after them. Moses followed God's instructions carefully, and it all worked! Once God's people, the people of Israel, had escaped from Egypt, Moses led them through the desert on foot to go to the land which God had chosen for them. It was a long and difficult journey. The desert is a hard place. There was no McDonald's. There was no Starbuck's. In fact there was no food or water to be found. So God sent them special food, called Manna and God made Moses strike a big rock with his staff, and water came out for them to drink. It was a miracle!

But the journey was long, and the people got tired of eating the same old manna every day. They complained and complained to Moses. Night and day they complained. Poor Moses was getting no sleep at all, and he was tired of his job as the leader. So Moses complained to God. He said, "How on earth do you expect me to be the mother to all these people? It is just too much work for one person, God. This is not fair. Can I get some help here?"

So God thought about it, and God said to Moses: "OK. Here's the deal. Get your 70 best people to meet me in the tent where you and I usually talk. I will take some of the Holy Spirit which I gave to you and give it to them, too. They will be your team of helpers so that you don't have to do everything by yourself anymore."

So once again Moses followed God's instructions carefully. He picked out the 70 people and they all went to the tent to meet with God. And God took some of the Holy Spirit that God had given to Moses and spread it around so that the others had some, too. And sure enough, those other people began to act like prophets, too. They began to get God's instructions and give them to the people, just like Moses had been doing!

But suddenly something happened that did not seem like part of the plan. Eldad and Medad, two of the people of Israel who had not been chosen to go to the tent for the special

meeting with God, suddenly began to receive God's instructions and give them to the people, too! They had not been picked by Moses. They had not gone to the tent. They were just hanging out back in the camp with the others when suddenly some of the Holy Spirit came upon them, too. Was this right, wondered the people? Was this fair? So they sent a messenger to Moses, who was still in the tent. The messenger tattled on them to Moses: "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp! Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!"

People thought Eldad and Medad were in big trouble. But they were wrong. Even Joshua, Moses' right hand man, wanted Moses to give Eldad and Medad a time out. But Moses was not mad at all. In fact Moses may have chuckled a bit. He knew that only God could send down the Holy Spirit. He knew also that he needed all the help he could get. And he saw that God could give the Holy Spirit wherever and to whomever God pleased. So Moses said to the messenger and to Joshua and to all the people: "Do you think that having even more leaders blessed with the Holy Spirit is a problem for me? Do you think that there is not enough Holy Spirit to go around? You are wrong. I wish that all of God's people were prophets and that God would give the Holy Spirit to all of them!"

God must have been listening to Moses that day. God must have thought about what Moses was suggesting. Because many thousand years later, God decided to grant Moses's wish. On the day of Pentecost, which we are celebrating today, God did send down the Holy Spirit on all of God's people so that they could all hear God's instructions and follow them. They could all help out their leaders—which was a good thing, because apparently God was now going to reach out to bring God's freedom to everyone who might be a slave to something or someone else. God wanted to set everyone free, and that was going to be a big job and need a lot of helpers! Helpers like you, and you, and you, and you....

The Rev. Dana L. Campbell, Interim Rector