Numbers 11:29 I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!

Do you know what a steward is? That’s right, steward, as in stewardship! A steward is someone who has been put in charge of the property of another. It is the steward’s job to take care of and manage all aspects of that property. That steward needs to be fully aware that there will be a time when the owner of the property will ask for an accounting of his time and accomplishments with the property. If the owner is pleased the steward is well rewarded. Should the owner be displeased…well, let’s just say that it won’t be a happy moment.

With that definition I think that most of you recognize your stewardship roles. Fact is, each one of us is a steward of God’s possessions. By the way, I don’t care if you know or believe you are a steward or not. Everyone according to God’s Word is a steward. If you are an unbeliever you will not care about stewardship. If you are a believer, stewardship is the way we conduct our lives. It’s just a simple fact of Christianity.

Why? Because all that we have and all that we receive is from the Lord and is the Lord’s. We are stewards of God. Taking care of God’s things in the way that God wants us to. Now if you don’t believe that everything you have is God’s and from God all you need to do is ask yourself just how much of it you will be taking with you when you are called out of this world? How did Job put it when he lost every earthly thing in his life? He said, **“Naked I came from my mother’s womb and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.”** That man understood the truth about possessions and life in this world.

Today, as we look at our text, it is a great text for reminding us that we have responsibilities as the stewards of God. We are all aware of the fact that most talk of stewardship in terms of time, talents and treasures, but you know me. I am more concerned with your time and talents. Because my experience is that when you put in time with the Lord, use your talents to serve the Lord all other things follow in good order. In other words, God will direct and guide you in your treasures, I will encourage you in your time and talents to the glory of the Lord. Our theme for today will be: **CALLED TO SERVE!**

I think the first thing we need to do is understand the context of this particular text. The Israelites, two months earlier, had been led by God’s prophet Moses away from slavery in Egypt. This exodus was accomplished through God’s power as is clearly seen in all the miracles, signs and wonders recorded for us.

The problem is that the Israelites then were like all people now. They needed leaders and authorities to keep them in line and to show the proper way to behave. Up to this point the only leader put over the people of God was Moses. God spoke to Moses. God revealed his plans to Moses. All of this was done in plain sight of all the people. But can you imagine the burden? Moses was in charge of some 3 or 4 million people. As one might expect, it was no easy task, especially because Moses was dealing with people.

In Numbers 11:11-14 we hear the complaint of Moses to the Lord. The Israelites were being rather cantankerous, filled with grumbling and complaining of all sorts. It seems it finally got to Moses. He took the problem to the Lord. He said, **“Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceived this people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries and infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? ...I cannot carry all of these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me.”**

At first you might be shocked by Moses’ words. I mean, “How dare he speak to the Lord God that way!” Thank goodness for God’s grace. Moses was only a man. A sinful man who could get weighed down and burdened by the responsibilities the Lord had given. It is because Moses is feeling this burden—a burden born of his desire to serve the Lord and these people in the best way possible—that Moses is here asking for help. He might have done it with more gutsy words than I might use, but the fact is Moses is asking for help. “Lord, I need help in my ministry. I need help in the tasks of management that you have given me.” I would like to point out that those words could actually be the words of any steward of God!

What is awesome to grasp is that the Lord heard the complaint of Moses and our text is how he dealt with it. The Lord asked that seventy of the Elders of the people come to the Tent of Meeting to meet with Moses and the Lord. It is entirely possible that this is the same group of seventy elders who were allowed to go up on Mt. Sinai to meet with the Lord, we are not sure. What we are sure of is these men were chosen because they already had a reputation of respect and honor among the people. God called them to meet with him and as we learn in the text 68 of them came. We are not sure why the other two did not come, but clearly the Lord does not hold back on them. Because God took these men, all seventy, and He poured His Spirit on them!

We are told that the outpouring of the Spirit lead these men to prophesy. This doesn’t mean that they began to foretell the future or any other mystical thing. There are those who insist this word implies some sort of mysticism or maybe ecstatic speech, like many claim at Pentecost but I believe that a push of the word. The word “prophesy” is a word that means “a person authorized to speak for someone.” Do you remember when Moses was called to be the Lord’s prophet? Moses complained he didn’t talk very well, so God told him his brother Aaron would be his “Prophet.” God spoke to Moses, Moses spoke to Aaron and Aaron spoke to the people! A spokesmen, that’s what the word means. Now I do think that something a bit out of the ordinary did happen but it only happened once. What I think is that all of these Elders, all 68 of them and the two still among the tents, all began to speak together in their own language, giving praise and thanks to God together as a group. More a bit later.

Please note that this was God’s way of showing that these men were being appointed the responsibilities of Elders and leaders among the people on God’s authority. Remember that before they even got to Mt. Sinai Moses father-in-law Jethro had suggested appointing judges and such over various levels of people. But I am going to guess that while it was a good idea, it didn’t work because the people did not recognize and grasp the authority of these men before the Lord. So it is in this way that the Lord solves the problem of too much on Moses’ shoulders. In other words, it was now to be known that these men were to be considered servants of God, representatives of the Lord in what they did! Co-rulers with Moses. Helpers of Moses. God’s servants to help his people.

What a wonderful thing to behold? These men would be serving the Lord by helping to lead the people of God. They were to be witnesses to God and to God’s Word. They were to use their abilities to serve, judge, administrate and set the example for others to follow. This special gift of the Spirit was God’s marker of His wishes carried out. They were servants of God, but they were not to consider themselves exalted above anyone! Remember they were given this gift of the Spirit in special measure just once as our text tells us, **“they prophesied, but they did not do so again.”** It was a stark contrast to Moses who regularly was in the presence of God!

Now let’s take a moment and consider the two men in the camp who for whatever reason were not able to make this meeting. I would think their excuse was pretty good, because it was the Lord who told them to come. Yet do note that the Lord still puts his Spirit on them and they do exactly what the other 68 do, they break out in praise, thanks and glory to God. They are still included in the seventy. I will tell you my thoughts on this. Since all the elders were meeting at the Tent of Meeting which was outside of the camp of the Israelites, the only ones who saw or knew about the prophesying were the men gathered there, I figure 72 people! There was no one else there! Now, take those two men who were in the camp. Everyone around them heard what was going on. In other words, did God work it that they had good reason to stay in the camp that the people might know of this special gift and calling to serve? And please note that when the young man runs to Moses, I think he hears the other 68 saying the very same thing together and that is how everyone realizes that they are a part of the group of elders called to serve!

Of course, Joshua, Son of Nun, zealous for Moses, cries out, **“Moses, my Lord, stop them!”** Not the 68 in front of the Tent of Meeting but the two in the camp where the people could see and hear what was going on. Maybe Joshua felt that these men would become too important or somehow undermine the leadership of Moses, because the people saw them prophesying!

What an opportunity for Moses to display the true nature of the servant of God. Moses does not wish them stopped but rather says, **“Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!”**

Moses was not jealous of this gift from God. Moses was not worried that his duty to the Lord was in danger. Moses was thrilled by the event. Moses in humbleness states the desire that all people would take up the task of serving the Lord. I want you to understand that Moses would get his wish.

Moses got his wish but not in his lifetime or in the lifetime of any of the people there. This wish came true on the day of Pentecost. On that day Peter would say of the gift of the Holy Spirit, **“No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel; In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy…Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.”** (Acts 2:17-18)

Today all people have this gift to be the servant of God. All people have the ability to serve with whatever talents the Lord has given. And everyone can certainly share the message of Jesus or at least be instrumental in inviting people to your church and be enthusiastic about the grace of God given us! To tell others about the Lord and his wonders to behold. In 1 Peter we hear this truth in these words: **“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (2:9).**

We have all, as Christians, as God’s children, been given the Spirit of God. Why do you think you are sitting here? Why do you think you keep getting up and on Thursday or Sunday you come to give worship and praise to the Lord? Because of the Spirit of God! We have been called to serve the Lord and to minister to the Lord with our time, our abilities and our blessings. No one is exempt. For each and every person has had the wonder of Jesus proclaimed to them and we know we are His because of what He did for us!

There is the key to all of this. In the Old Testament all the people of Israel were to have faith in the Savior who had been promised. In the New Testament all of the people were to have faith in the Savior who had come, suffered, died and rose from the dead for them. Even today, our faith is to rest in Jesus and his wonderful gift of salvation. This gift is given to us by God’s Holy Spirit as He works in us through the Gospel in Word and sacrament. As you come forward to partake of the sacrament today, think about what Jesus has done for you, about the forgiveness and eternal life that is given to you just because you have heard his gospel grace in Jesus and many of you have partaken of the Lord’s Supper as He has said. As you come to church to give thanks and praise to God for his grace in your life, you are here to be fed and nourished by the Holy Spirit and then to help and encourage your fellow church members in whatever way you can. We work together. We work to the joy of the Lord. We work to bring the wonder of Jesus wherever we can because that’s what we do as saved children of God!

The truth has been set forth. As God’s called people in Moses’ day, a small group in a sea of people, to serve him so it still goes today. We are called to serve, the few walking the narrow path. Not in pride or with empty excuses for why we can’t, but in the best way that God has laid before us in our lives. Parents leading children. Extended family members encouraging all to give worship and praise to Jesus. Friends putting arms around others to let them know you care and want to help them. In other words, to simply serve God in everything we do. To be the physical presence of God’s love and grace to a world in the wilderness. God help us in this. Amen.