

Sermon - Pentecost 19 – Proper 21 Year B.
Heidi J. A. Carter, Lay Associate for Ministry
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Numbers 11:4-6,10-16,24-29
Psalm 19:7-14
James 5:13-20
Mark 9:38-50

Good morning.

When I listen to the readings in church each week, I can't help but wonder what everyone sitting around me is thinking about - as the characters, events, and conversations unfold; How different people hear the familiar poetry, stories, and prayers... and if they tell others about them later. These stories we are entrusted to ~ not just take off the shelf once every three years, dust them off, then restore them to the shelf ~ but to keep telling, to wrap them around our stories, broadening their understanding, giving them continued witness, contemporary agency and voice; expanding them out - into world today.

The Gospel does that. It expands. Always. It does not get smaller when we leave this building, or stay in that book on the altar. It spreads, often in ways we do not expect. It is like these candles that we light, representing God's spirit. I can give every single person in here a candle, and you can light it from this flame, and this flame will not get smaller when you leave the building with your share.

We are not the only ones with a share – a bit of light - to take into the world. This light that can feel counter-cultural in today's harsh and fearful environment. Who are the light-bearers into these struggles, suggesting we speak light to darkness? God's truth to power?

Can you think of a person, or entire groups of people today who, tired of being on the sidelines of their own destiny, finally said – enough? Maybe you, or someone you know, in a personal struggle for wellness. Maybe people in one of the movements like Right to Work or Human Rights, Black Lives Matter or Teachers Unions. People standing up to whoever, or whatever system is holding them back.

People who, in doing so, have set their lives, and entire communities, on a new path. A path of their choosing; imperfect, bumpy distracted paths with road blocks lobbed at them at every turn, but on paths that nonetheless, now, finally, arc towards justice?

Can you think of situations where those in positions of power, finally heard their protests? Who conceded that they, in fact, might be blind to the experience and needs of the many they should be leading? So they listen deeply, not without what they might perceive as personal cost and public resistance, but eventually, willingly or not, who share their power, even if that means simply getting out of the way, so those inside can affect change more directly and effectively?

Moses had finally had enough and asked God to please help. So God summoned the leaders within the travelers and poured-out powers of prophecy on them, that they might also be filled with God's spirit, and share peace and protection among their complaining people. Even *while* they were still struggling. It was too much for just one person to do. Then, when it was discovered that people on whom the spirit rested, outside of the circle, also prophesied, causing alarm, Moses spoke those great words – “Would that all ‘the lord’s people were prophets!”

Jesus and his followers also heard of others outside of their circle spreading the good news of God and the same question was asked. Are these people qualified to be God's prophets? To speak God's truth to power – in love?

And we still ask the question today - are you so qualified? Do you have to graduate from seminary, run a nonprofit or be a nun before you have the right to use your words to share God's spirit and grace; to demand God's justice and healing – even and especially in the midst of pain?

Who are you to call yourself a prophet? But I ask instead, who are you not to? Because what if you are, like me, a mass of contradictions? Sometimes generous to a fault, and often selfish. Possessing unlimited energy to make a difference, and suffering mightily from issue fatigue. A friend to many, and not a friend... also to many. Broken and whole. But the healing of the world cannot wait until all of the prophets are perfect, with unblemished records, absolute certainty, no scars, and appropriately pedigreed. **We go forth broken**, carrying God's light from this place anyway – guided by these ancient stories. I cannot be counted-out as a prophet of God. And neither can you.

When James suggests that you pray and give thanks in response to what happens in your life, it is not necessarily so that you can affect change in specific outcomes, but it is so that you can desire steadfast peace of heart, peace of mind, hope and protections - - - in the face of the challenges and joys of this life. That you can, as the psalmist suggests, revive your soul, have light in your eyes, and even when you offend, strive to be whole and sound, so that you can speak in ways that are acceptable to God. And **be** a beacon of God's light, hoping others might do so as well.

There's that bit at the end of the gospel that reminds us that we are the salt of the earth. And the thing about salt is that too much of it, and everything tastes like salt. Too little of it and things just don't quite light-up. But in the perfect amount – salt makes a thing taste even more like itself. For better or for worse. We are the *salt* of the world. God longs for us to **be** us. To be our messy glorious selves. To salt this earth - and all who inhabit her - with what we know of God.

I want everyone who crosses *our* paths - to find in *our* words, and in our actions – the spirit and light of God. Especially when faced with ugliness, heartache and fear. I encourage you, like Moses did – to stop when you are overwhelmed. Ask for help. It is too much for just one person to manage alone – and there's no reason you should try. And like Jesus, *thank* others when they step up and help you, and work to spread this light, whether you invited them or not. **It will not diminish**. Go to the ministry fair this morning and choose just one thing, maybe something entirely new, and give it a year. See how it fits. If it doesn't, pick something else next year. It might not be perfect, but it doesn't have to be.

We are all destined to be prophets of one kind or another. Let's choose, as we leave here together after the fair, taking our lights out into the world, prophets bearing witness – speaking God's light, peace and truth - to power - in love.

Let's pray. God, your light is in our hearts, and our lives are in your hands. And for that we give you thanks. Amen.