

I knew it was going to be a busy week when Bill's email arrived in my inbox asking me to do a St. John's podcast. He recommended I use one of the lectionary readings as a jumping off point. I immediately gravitated to Acts 2 and Numbers 11. A few years back I had studied these two passages together for a chapter I wrote. When I searched for the paper on the cloud, I could not locate the document. I later realized I had written the chapter over 15 years ago. Oh my, how time flies.

In any case, here's the theological reading of these two passages.

*Reading the Two Testaments Together* (If you're not familiar with Numbers 11, maybe pause the recording for a minute and read through the chapter.)

#### *Numbers 11: Moses and Pentecost*

Background to Numbers 11: Moses overwhelmed with the burden of ministry complained to the Lord saying, "If this is how you're going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me." The Lord answered saying He would share the burden of leadership and "take some of the Spirit that is on you, Moses, and put it on the elders." So, Moses gathered the elders, as commanded, and the Lord came down in a cloud and took some of the Spirit that was on Moses and put it on the elders. And when the Spirit rested upon them they prophesied, but they did not do so again.

Two of the elders refused to gather at the tent, as they were instructed, but they also prophesied. Moses' assistant, Joshua, Son of Nun, seeking to protect Moses' authority, demanded that Moses stop them. Moses responded, "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." Moses looked forward to the day when all the Lord's people would be prophets and the Lord's Spirit would be upon them all. In Moses's day the Spirit was shared with elders to demonstrate God's power and to confirm their leadership of God's community.

I suggest in Acts 2 the author is arguing via the comparison of the two historical events, which featured the outpouring of the Spirit, that Pentecost was the fulfillment of Moses' desire. At Pentecost, we see the confirmation of the apostolic leadership by God through the pouring out of the Spirit. We also see the emergence of the leadership of the new covenant. The apostles huddled together in a locked room, emerged filled with the Spirit and spoke with confidence and boldness to the gathering crowds. Unlike Moses, who preferred to die than answer to the angry Israelites, Peter and the disciples did not shrink from the task assigned to them. They acted confidently because they knew Jesus was the Holy One of God who spoke the words of eternal life. They were confident because God had raised Jesus from the grave (to which they were eye witnesses) and had poured out His promised Holy Spirit (which was witnessed by those present on the day of Pentecost.)

#### *The Fulfillment of the Law*

The connection between the Jewish feast of Shavuot and Pentecost.

Shavuot celebrated 50 days after Passover commemorates God's giving of the law to Moses and Israel on Mount Sinai. On Passover, the Jewish release from captivity is remembered. Fifty days later, on the Shavuot, the giving of the law and the formation of the people of God are remembered. Pentecost, celebrated 50 days after Easter, celebrates the descent of the Spirit onto the apostolic community and the formation of the church. Typically, the Spirit and the law

are held up as opposites, but in the memory of the early church the descent of the Spirit recalled the giving of the law.

*Compare and contrast the giving of the law on Mount Sinai and Pentecost.*

The first law was written on stone, the second law was written on the hearts of the people by the Spirit of God. When the first law came there was condemnation (see Exodus 32:28, 3000 men died that day.) The second came inwardly in order that the people of God might be justified (see Acts 2:41, that day 3000 souls were added.)

Jesus contrasted the internal difference of the law associated with the Kingdom of Heaven with the law given through Moses. He said, "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'you shall not murder.' But I say to you that if you were angry with your brother or sister you're liable to judgment." Likewise, Paul argued that the commandments received at Sinai could be summed up, love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law, (Romans 13:9-10.) This fulfilling of the law of love is accomplished by God's love, which has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. (See Romans 5:5.) The gifts of confidence, and the interiorized love of God, empowered the community of disciples for mission, and to share a common life characterized by love of God (worship) and love of neighbor (glad and generous hearts.) Missional transformational community, then, is first and foremost a community shaped and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

*Conclusion*

As we emerge from the COVID lockdown, are we going out confidently, trusting in the Lord that goes before us? Are we moving forward in the love of God, that is, empowered by the Holy Spirit?