

# A Clean Church

**The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost** [Proper 21b]

September 30, 2018

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

<sup>4</sup> Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, "Oh that we had meat to eat! <sup>5</sup> We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. <sup>6</sup> But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at." ... <sup>10</sup> Moses heard the people weeping throughout their clans, everyone at the door of his tent. And the anger of the LORD blazed hotly, and Moses was displeased. <sup>11</sup> Moses said to the LORD, "Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? <sup>12</sup> Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,' to the land that you swore to give their fathers? <sup>13</sup> Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' <sup>14</sup> I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. <sup>15</sup> If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness." <sup>16</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. ... <sup>24</sup> **So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. And he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tent. <sup>25</sup> 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 as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it. <sup>26</sup> Now 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. <sup>27</sup> And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." <sup>28</sup> And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, "My lord Moses, stop them." <sup>29</sup> But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"**

**In the Name of Jesus.**

How does the Holy Spirit work toward you, toward me?

We believe in the Holy Spirit. That the Church confesses each time we say the Nicene Creed or the Apostles' Creed.

*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting,*

This confession that we have faith in the Holy Spirit means something for each of us. It means that not only do we confess that God the Spirit is, himself, holy, but we confess also that he makes us holy.

That is the Holy Spirit's office: to take sinners and make them holy; to take you and me and our families, and make all of us together holy.

"Just as the Father is called *Creator*," says the Large Catechism, "and the Son is called Redeemer, so the Holy Spirit from his work must be called Sanctifier, that is, the One who makes holy."

You will not be holy by anything you do. You will not be holy by any worthiness of your own. You will not be holy by improving yourself or having your life changed. You will not be holy by anything of yourself or anything under your control.

That's what it means to be a sinner. We are sinners, and we can't be who we're not. A snake's a snake, even if he wants to be a puppy; a wolf can't be anything but a wolf, even were he to try to make himself a sheep; and a sinner can't be anything but a sinner, even if he tries to appear holy.

You can't make yourself clean or holy. But the Holy Spirit does. That is his office. And for the Holy Spirit to make you and me holy, for him to gather us into the Church, the congregation of those who are made holy, for the Holy Spirit to daily forgive us of our sin and clothe us with the righteousness of Christ Jesus, this is, for you and me, salvation.

So the Prophet Moses, speaking by the Holy Spirit, gathered seventy elders of Israel to the Tabernacle, and the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to Moses, and the Lord put the Holy Spirit on the seventy.

In Scripture, to have the Holy Spirit put *on* a man is to have the man put into the office of the Holy Spirit.

Every Israelite has the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to a person in the Word of Promise. By that Word, the Holy Spirit dwells with a person, daily forgiving sin and making holy.

But here the Holy Spirit is not *in* these seventy men. He is *upon* them. That is, they're clothed in the Holy Spirit's office. They belong to his task. And the Holy Spirit's task is, to make sinners holy.

Israel has a lot of sinners. The rabble is among them. They were complaining about the gifts the Lord was giving them; they were turning from his Word; they were even saying they wished the Lord had not delivered them out of Egypt, and talking about how they would rather go back into to slavery than remain with the Lord.

A lot of sinners in Israel! This is a rebellious and unclean people.

The Lord, though, has put his Name on them. They are his own. The Lord has promised to continue gathering them to his Name and to continue cleansing them and making them holy.

That's why the Lord had instructed Moses to build the Tabernacle.

The Tabernacle was the home of the Ark of the Covenant. On the Ark of the Covenant, the Lord located his Name. So that, then the Lord could gather these Israelites to his Name, where he would then have the priest cleanse them with the blood of the sacrifice. And the last word the priest would say to the Israelite family as they were preparing to leave the Tabernacle to return to their own tent was, "*You are clean.*"

That's the Word the Holy Spirit wanted the Israelite to hear. For that Word, the Holy Spirit had Moses build the Tabernacle and set up the priesthood. Everything in Israel is about that Word, that public declaration, *You are clean*.

It is as the Large Catechism puts it, *The Spirit of God is the Holy Spirit, and he makes you holy*. Holy and clean. Forgiven and honored before God the Father.

Everything the Holy Spirit is doing toward you and me and our families is toward that declaration, *You*

*are clean.*

So now this history of Israel, of the Tabernacle, of the Ark of the Covenant, comes up to us.

How does the Lord fit us into that? Where does the Lord dwell in his Name for us? Where does he locate his Name in order to call and gather you and me and our families to it, in order to declare, *You are clean?*

The Tabernacle, that tent constructed under Moses, is no more. Jesus has come in the flesh. He is God tabernacling among sinners. [John 1:14] So if we want to find the Tabernacle of God, we look for Jesus.

The Ark of the Covenant is no more. On top of the Ark of the Covenant was the mercy seat where God dwelled in his Name. Jesus is the mercy seat, providing atonement for all sinners.

The priesthood established by Moses to declare sinners clean, it is no more. Jesus is the High Priest giving the atoning sacrifice of his own blood. From his mouth we will hear the declaration, *You are clean.*

And the Israel of God? The true Israel made up of nothing but sinners, but those sinners who are gathered together by the Holy Spirit? Israel is the Church. It is all those gathered to the Name of Jesus, all those called to the Table of the Body and the Blood, where the sinner is forgiven of all sin and declared clean by Jesus, the High Priest.

But our eyes are on the Name, our view is toward what the Lord is doing to make sinners clean, our faith is in the Holy Spirit who is making sinners holy by the Word of Gospel and the Sacraments of Christ Jesus.

Our eyes looking for holiness are not on those in the Church. We will never find holiness by eyesight. By eyesight, Israel was a rebellious people filled with rabble and complainers. Yet, this was the holy people of God, a people bearing his Name and living in his forgiveness.

We will never find holiness by eyesight. By our eyes, Peter could be an arrogant man demanding

obedience to the Law. Yet, Peter was a holy one, he bore Jesus' Name, he received Jesus' Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sin, he lived in Jesus' forgiveness; Peter is clean.

By our eyesight, Stephen was a weak man who got himself stoned to death. He had built up no earthly wealth or kingdoms. Yet, Stephen was a holy one, he bore Jesus' Name and he proclaimed Jesus' Name to others, he received Jesus' Body and Blood for the forgiveness of his sin and life everlasting; Stephen is clean.

In our eyesight now, the Church, the people in it—they are not in it randomly. No one is in the Church because they decided to show up, like any of us might decide to show up to an art show or the grand-opening of a brew-pub—the people in the Church are in the Church because they have been gathered by the Holy Spirit.

He gathers by having the Gospel of all sins forgiven by Jesus Christ, the Gospel of the sinner justified freely before God by the Word, by having this Gospel proclaimed and gathering sinners to the Body and Blood of Christ Jesus, so that, by gathering them to the Name, the Holy Spirit is not only holy, himself, but is making sinners holy.

You can't make yourself clean or holy. But the Holy Spirit does. That is his office. That is what he is pleased to do. In that work of his, as sinners are being gathered to the Holy Name for the forgiveness of all sin, all the angels of Heaven rejoice.

So now, as we look around the Church, not just the Church gathered to the Lord's Word and Sacrament this morning, but the Church throughout the world, including our brothers and sisters in lands where they even now are persecuted and killed for the Name of Jesus—as we look around the Church, we can see ourselves and our fellow sinners, our brothers and sisters who sometimes look like rabble, other times look like Peter acting in arrogance, and we can rejoice, *We bear the Name, we are clean.*

Mark 9:41:

**[Jesus said,] "Truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward."**

This is the work of the Holy Spirit, to give you the Name of Christ in Holy Baptism. To proclaim the Name of Christ to you in the Gospel. To gather you to the Name of Christ given in the holy Body and Blood.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit. You are clean. You are holy.

**In the Name of Jesus.**