

Needing All the Help We Can Get ~ September 27, 2009
Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29; James 5:13-20; Mark 9:38-50; Psalm 124

Have you ever had a week in which it seems:

*“Everybody’s talking at me,
 I don’t hear a word they’re saying,
 Only the echoes of my mind.
 People stopping staring
 I can’t see their faces,
 Only the shadows of their eyes.*

*I’m going where the sun keeps shining
 Thru’ the pouring rain,
 Going where the weather suits my clothes,
 Backing off of the North East wind,
 Sailing on summer breeze
 And skipping over the ocean like a stone.”*

(Harry Nilsson version, 1969)

Of course we have all had days and weeks during which everyone around us has a need to share their thoughts, concerns, joys, sorrows and whatever else they may have on their minds. Even the Jehovah Witnesses stop by for a little chat. For those of us who are listeners, this kind of week can lead to mental exhaustion.

We are certainly not alone in this. People throughout the ages have felt and carried the burdens of others. Think of poor Moses. The nation Israel loved to grumble its way through the wilderness. Nothing ever seemed to go right. When they were starving, there was manna from heaven. But, that was not enough, so there were quails. But, then, the people noticed the cucumbers and other condiments were lacking. No wonder Moses complained to God and asked what he had ever done to deserve the life he was living.

So, the story goes, God had Moses round up the elders and God gave them a touch of the spirit Moses had to help with the people. However, as in all such human endeavors, boundaries were drawn by those so anointed. When others dared take up the mantle and to help out there was a hue and cry that they were certainly not qualified to do so. “No, no, no,” they were told—“you are not doing this the right way and you are acting without proper authority.”

Moses must have shaken his head. He probably said, in effect, “Hey, knock it off, we need all the help we can get.”

Jesus knew this, too. He knew there was a certain amount of envy and jealousy in every human soul. He reminded his disciples that there should be no doors closed to people who did not have quite “the right credentials” to do his work. Whatever those were. If people were lending a helping hand, that was all that mattered. If someone was doing

work in his name, that was all that was needed. Whoever was with him could not be against him.

Too often in life, we draw our own little boundaries and try to protect our territory. We feel, like those who followed Moses and those who were the disciples of Christ, that we have the only franchise to do one thing or another in life. If we are effective in broadcasting this to others, telling them that they are not quite good enough to do the work that has been entrusted to us, we often find ourselves working alone and then complaining about it. We become martyrs, like Moses, until we have had too much and we may even cry out to God, asking how we have been stuck with a certain task and wishing for death to escape it. When we get to this point and realize that our pride gets us nowhere, we might break down and ask for help. I know, as well as you do, that nine times out of ten we will receive that help. We discover that many hands make light work and we learn, if we are wise at all, to appreciate those who step forward even if they don't do things in precisely the way we would do them. We learn to accept their help with gratitude without making sure they have the proper licenses and credentials. Like Moses and Jesus we understand that we need all the help we can get with any project and that we must never sit in judgment of another person and their skills, which have been lovingly offered. Appreciating one another right where we are in life leads us to harmonious interactions and to a better understanding of the struggling humans around us.

If we only offer criticism we put stumbling blocks in the way of another person. We remind them that they are not quite good enough. We remind them that they are not living up to our “expectations.” I grind my teeth whenever I hear someone say this. I remember a time long ago and far away when a new acquaintance told me that I had not lived up to his expectations in a response in a meeting. Excuse me—how dare you have “expectations” of me? You may have hopes but please no confining prison of “your expectations.” His statement called to mind a little reading from Fritz Perls that tells us:

*I do my thing
and you do your thing.
I am not in this world
to live up to your expectations
And you are not in this world
to live up to mine.*

*You are you and I am I.
And if by chance
we find each other, it's beautiful,
If not, it can't be helped.*

We are in this life together—we need to learn to make the journey one that is more pleasant and productive for all. When we have a nice full plate before us, we should not always be looking around for the cucumbers.

The author of the Letter of James takes the lessons of Moses and Jesus a bit farther and tells those who would read his missive that they are responsible for the welfare of one another. We are in community with one another to uplift each other. We are not gathered together to find fault, complain, think our way is the only way, or create

artificial boundaries that keep others from sharing in all the vital work that needs doing. We always need all the help we can get and that is freely offered. Treating one another with a measure of graciousness and kindness works far better than dismissing one another—as Moses might have liked to have done.

So remember, when:

*Everybody's talking at me,
I don't hear a word they're saying,
Only the echoes of my mind.
People stopping staring
I can't see their faces,
Only the shadows of their eyes.*

There is always help on the way through one another and the God who sustains us all.

--Amen