

**Sermon on June 17<sup>th</sup> 2007, 2nd Sunday after Trinitatis  
Stephansstift, 11.30 am**

Text: Num 11

Grace be with you and peace of God our father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear congregation!

Today I thought it was a good idea to have a sermon about the Holy Spirit. Because we are here a congregation of people who come from different backgrounds, countries and whatever. Here we easily experience the connecting power of the Spirit. Through the Spirit God creates a sense of belonging together and by this he lets us feel that we all are brothers and sisters in Christ. It is a great joy for me to be here today and to deliver the sermon.

In the bible we find quite a few stories about the Holy Spirit. One of them is written in the book of Numbers. That one is part of the long walk through the desert. Before I read I would like to tell you shortly what has happened so far to give you the context: The Israelites have escaped from Egypt. In the beginning they were all happy to be free. They danced and sang and praised God for his power and grace.

However soon they discovered how difficult freedom can be. They realised that life was still hard for them and as a consequence they started to complain. About food for exemple. Every day Manna and Manna and Manna. After some weeks they didn't like the Manna any more. In their memories Egypt became a place almost like paradise a place of fine food as meat, cucumbers, watermelons. The Israelites were standing in front of their tents and were moaning. In small groups they came together to share their good memories about Egypt. Moses saw them putting their heads together and whispering to each other. He heard this noise of complains and dissatisfaction and felt lonely and frustrated. He might have shaken his head almost crying for anger, thinking: "Can't they be a bit grateful. After all God has freed them from slavery." Moses was so fed up that he couldn't talk to these poeple. He pressed his lips together, went away to be alone. Then he turned to God and said.

*Why have you treated me so badly? Why are you displeased with me? Why have you given me the responsibility for all these people? I didn't create them or bring them to birth! Why should you ask me to act like a nurse and carry them in my arms like*

*babies all the way to the land you promised to their ancestors? I can't be responsible for all these people by myself. It's too much for me. If you are going to treat me like this, take pity on me and kill me, so that I won't have to endure your cruelty any longer.*

These were aggressive words, weren't they? Moses must have been really furious. But it was not only anger or helplessness. I think part of the problem was that Moses didn't feel part of the people. In his speech there is no "we" or "us". It's all about "they" and "you". Moses was an outcast. It was too much for him because he couldn't identify himself with the people and the sorrows, the fear. Moses complained to God. And God? He reacted amazingly. He didn't shout at Moses: "How dare you talk to me like this." He didn't dismiss Moses saying: "I see now that you are not suitable for this job". He didn't comfort Moses saying: "I know that it is hard for you. I appreciate your great effort. Just keep going. I am with you. Within a few weeks you will be sitting under a nice fig tree. No! God did none of these possibilities. He listened. He waited patiently for Moses to say everything he wanted to say.

*The Lord said to Moses: Assemble seventy respected men who are recognized as leaders of the people, bring them to me at the Tent of my presence, and tell them to stand there beside you. I will come down and speak to you there, and I will take some of the spirit I have given you and give it to them. Then they can help you to bear the responsibility for these people, and you will not have to bear it alone.*

To solve the problems God gave Moses another task: "Assemble seventy respected men". That must have been a lot of work for Moses. I might be easy to find three or four, but seventy? That's quite a challenge. Especially for Moses, who didn't like these moaning and crying people. He had to go to them and to talk to them asking: "Who is a leader among your families?" He had to ask many times, to negotiate, to explain. He had to find them among all the people, the running children, Manna preparing woman and tents. How long did this take him? One day? A week? I don't know. Finally Moses managed. Then, the story continued:

*Moses went out and told the people what the Lord had said. He assembled 70 of the leaders and placed them round the Tent. Then the Lord came down in a cloud and*

*spoke to him. He took some of the spirit he had given to Moses and gave it to the 70 leaders. When the Spirit came on them, they began to shout like prophets. And they didn't stop.*

What a change! 70 inspired prophets were shouting and dancing and singing for joy. Everybody could easily see that these 70 men had now the Spirit. Surprisingly the immediate impact of the Spirit was no planning and distribution of tasks and responsibilities. The immediate impact was a sudden, great festival. I imagine, Moses was standing among the shouting 70 men and smiling. He didn't feel lonely and outcast anymore. He was part of his people again. The spirit connected the 70 men to him, as it was the same Spirit they had in common. After that story Moses was still the main responsible man.

He had to deal with many difficulties and conflicts. People continued to complain or to do wrong. But Moses wasn't alone anymore. To have 70 men behind him helped him to continue and to lead the Israelites to the end of the desert.

The story of Moses and the 70 leaders explains to us the great power of the Holy Spirit. Similar to the Pentecost story of the New Testament God turns loneliness into community and speechlessness into shouted words. Everybody can see the Spirit working and changing trouble and tears into joy. That is wonderful for those who experience it.

Now, what about us. We are sitting here nicely together and celebrate this service. We might not go into ecstasies and shout like prophets as the 70 men did or as it is common in other churches. However, that's fine. Shouting like prophets is not the only proof for the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has many ways to express itself. We can be sure that God has given his Spirit to us. We are baptized. As God is faithful he doesn't give and takes secretly away later on.

I don't know what kind of background you have. There might be people who have pentecostal background, who experienced the inspiring power of the Spirit in an overwhelming way. And that is wonderful. However we should not judge on what we see or have misconceptions of the Holy Spirit. I met in South Africa people who claimed: "If you have the Holy Spirit, you don't have any problems anymore. Whatever happens to you is not severe because you feel very much connected to God.

If you have to decide something, you just pray and the Spirit will tell you what to do. You always do right and good and become happy and rich.” That would be wonderful. But I can’t agree with this concept. The Holy Spirit is not a remote control that God uses to influence us. We remain human beings who make mistakes and have to live with the consequences. We have to make decisions, we can ask for advice and it’s good to pray. But still: we remain responsible for us and those who belong to us. And there might be moments when we feel far away from God, when we long for his guidance or comfort and can’t find it.

Not every day is a festival of the Holy Spirit. Just remember Moses. He had the Spirit of God and still it was difficult for him to do his job. He had to try hard and pray until God helped him by giving the Spirit to 70 men, by creating community.

That we can expect from the Spirit that it doesn’t leave us alone but binds us together in unity. In unity among human beings and in unity with God who will always be with us. Together, in community it is possible to go through difficult times and to create a good future for everybody. Together it is possible to celebrate a service and to remember the power and the love of God. Amen

Pastorin Mareile Klatt

Freundeskreis St. Peter’s Child Care e.V."

Kontonr.: 200 012 144

Bank: KSK-Schwalm-Eder

BLZ: 520 521 54