

This week's readings explore the concept of shared leadership and use both humor and compassion and downright common sense to do so.

Shared leadership is just what it sounds like, instead of being dependent on a leader for direction and making everybody happy – which when we are being reasonable we know is impossible to do – shared leadership is the idea that effective groups share the responsibility for the life and work of the group.

They share the responsibility for tracking and monitoring the overall health of the group as well as for ensuring that the tasks that need to be done are accomplished. When this works well the leader spends more time developing leaders than overseeing tasks so that the capacity of the group to take on more complicated tasks expands, increasing the amount of work that than can be done by the leader alone.

Case in point is our reading from Numbers. Moreover this is another one of those passages of scripture that is genuinely funny.

Moses is at his wits end dealing with the unruly band of ex-slaves, some of whom are not necessarily on board with the idea of being God's people. The author uses the uncomplimentary word rabble to describe those who started agitating for better rations.

Thanks to this agitation the Israelites are lamenting the lack of cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic in the desert. Moses cries out to God asking why God has placed him in such an untenable situation. Every now and then I identify with Moses, albeit in much less dire circumstances. Frankly Moses had more patience than I will ever hope to have, nevertheless Moses is ready to have God put him out of his misery since his charges are demanding meat and it's not like he can call in an order for delivery.

Or can he?

God apparently recognizes a superhuman intervention is required but God responds in a very practical way, telling Moses to find 70 decent guys on whom God will sprinkle a bit of the spirit that God had given to Moses. These guys do the work they were supposed to do, but two other guys, Eldad and Medad had stayed behind in the camp.

But Eldad and Medad didn't just stay behind they went ahead and prophesied anyway ...much to the consternation of Joshua who was Moses' assistant. Joshua is not happy about this unsanctioned use of power and runs tattling to Moses. "My Lord Moses", stop them."

This is the critical moment for Moses as a leader. Does he grab the reins of power, does he punish those who have assumed a mantle of authority?

No!

Moses says "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!" It's a scary moment when the time comes for the leader to let go and set those who have been prepared loose to do the work. It reflects the ability of the leader to

step back and not own everything, and not take credit for everything either as a martyr or as a hero.

Go Moses.

On the other hand, you do have to wonder about Joshua.

We get a similar scenario in our Gospel lesson.

John comes running up to Jesus to tell him that an exorcist was casting our demons in Jesus' name. John says that the disciples tried to stop him because he was not following them, fully expecting Jesus to be outraged by this alien usurpation of power.

But Jesus doesn't condemn the alien exorcist and we don't know anything about him except that he wasn't a disciple, instead Jesus says that the very act of doing something in his name is going to have an influence on whomever does so, and that "Whoever is not against is for us."

That's really powerful because Jesus is saying that sometime people are going to be able to do things in his name without being a conscious follower and that Jesus' influence is going to expand beyond this core group. Perhaps it implies that the disciples and those who come after them will not have exclusive access to the power of Jesus.

It's interesting that the disciples say that the exorcist doesn't follow "us" rather than "Jesus" implying that they have already inherited the full share of Jesus' power. Furthermore they may be on the defensive because a few verses earlier (9:18) they had not been able to exorcise a demon from a boy who had been brought to them and Jesus had given them a hard time about it. Perhaps their noses were put out of joint by the success of this alien exorcist.

In the gospel of John we hear Jesus say "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (Joh 3:8 NRS). That's the Spirit for you. According to the prophet Joel one of the signs that the day of the Lord has come is God's promise that "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh...even on the male and female slaves" . (Joel 2:28). It's also a good reminder that we should never confuse the church with God. We might be the body of Christ but we are not Christ. God is always free to act outside the boundaries of what we know and who we know, to choose the unexpected to further God's plan of salvation: the young shepherd boy who became king, the unknown exorcist casting our demons in Jesus name, or Eldad and Medad prophesying in the Israelites camp.

But this idea of shared leadership is not just for those who can prophesy or cast out demons with superhuman powers. James reminds us that it is the ties and the love that binds us together in community that creates the real capacity for shared leadership.

James says that those who are sick can call for the elders of the church to pray over them and to anoint them with oil. There is mutual care in this. Sins are to be confessed to each other, there is mutual accountability and a really scary level of honesty in being so open but also reflective of a deep level of trust from which a community can thrive and grow. Lastly, if anyone wanders away through sin, it is the job of church members to bring them back again. Can you imagine any of these things happening by themselves? No it takes intentional

development and risk-taking and corrective feedback to develop a community in which these are possible.

Although here at St. Paul's we might not be quite so far along as James' community in our practice of shared leadership our stewardship retreat suggested some significant opportunities to increase our capacity. These opportunities come out of the desire to care for our facilities as places of worship and ministry, to provide more opportunities for fellowship, and to go more deeply into our faith. Today at our community breakfast you will hear from some of the groups that keep St. Paul's together. Some groups support worship, some groups support our buildings, some groups support our ministries. The one thing they all have in common is that they build relationships where we can learn to love and serve God and each other, learn to trust each other, and to continue to develop as A faith community seeking to do God's work".

We know that there's plenty of work to do. Robin Sconzo will be leaving us before too long and she has done an outstanding job as warden and as co-chair of buildings and Grounds. Robin's work has enabled us to stay on top of many of the day-to-day maintenance issues that occur in any facility. She has also been active in keeping the Raise the Roof Campaign in front of us which has enabled us to make some significant improvements to our facilities including the parish hall roof, the repair of squirrel damage, and the painting of the parish hall. Robin will leave a big gap. Fortunately Conni Still is willing to step forward to fulfill Robin's remaining term as and Dee Laffin will continue as a leader of Buildings and Ground – but she will need assistance.

The list goes on from there. Opportunities abound for anyone who cares to get involved. Some opportunities will be requested, others you may spot yourselves so don't be shy about volunteering Working together creates and strengthens our relationships. It's all about shared leadership - an approach to community initiated by God, endorsed by his Son, and furthered by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

