

Rev. Heather A. Riggs
Oak Grove UMC
October 22, 2017
We Are The Church: Shared Leadership

Exodus 18:13-23

¹³The next day Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him from morning until evening. ¹⁴When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?" ¹⁵Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. ¹⁶When they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God." ¹⁷Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. ¹⁸You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. ¹⁹Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God; ²⁰teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do. ²¹You should also look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. ²²Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you, but decide every minor case themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. ²³If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace."

(Slide 1: We are the Church. Shared Leadership)

How many of you are familiar with the Exodus story?

There was a famine in the time of Joseph (the one with the rainbow coat) and the people of Israel became refugees in Egypt. They were there for many generations and they never fit in -- they spoke a different language, ate different food, had a different religion, so they became an underclass of immigrant workers with no political voice in a land not their own. Eventually the Egyptians enslaved them and the people cried out to God. So God sent Moses to lead the people out of Egypt and back to the land of Israel.

During all of the conflict of escaping Pharaoh, Moses had sent his family to live with his father-in-law Jethro. Now that things were calming down,

Jethro had come to bring them back to Moses. This is where our reading picks up.

The very next day, “from morning to evening” (18:13), Moses sat as judge for the people. Moses hadn’t seen his wife and sons for, I don’t know how long, and he can’t even take a day to be with his family? And they were little! Eliezer, must have been really little, because his name is explained as “The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh” (Ex 3:4), which had just happened.

But the people had been in slavery for so long, generations and generations that they didn’t really know how to govern themselves. And God hadn’t given Moses the Torah -- the commandments, to share with the people yet. So it was all on Moses. He must have felt that there was just no way for him to take a day off. Because everything was different and nobody really knew what to do.

(Slide 2: A Wilderness of Change)

Our world is changing. Technology has changed the way we work, the way we communicate, the way we interact with the world. Even the way we pray -- there’s an app for that, you know!

Sometimes I feel like we are also out in the wilderness, like the Israelites. Like all the rules have changed --

- for how to parent
- how to get by in this economy
- How to manage our schedules in this 24 hour/hyperconnected world
- How to be a Christian in a post-Christendom culture
- How to be a church when soccer games are on Sundays

And into the middle of the wilderness of uncertainty, God sent Jethro.

I think Jethro was a good dad and grandfather. I think Jethro had loved having his grandsons and daughter stay with him while Moses was leading the people to freedom. I think Jethro loved playing with little Gershom and

Eliezer and loved watching his daughter be a mom. And, maybe Jethro was feeling a little sad about saying goodbye.

I can just imagine Jethro going to say good morning to his daughter and grandkids. And finding chaos. Zipporah is trying to get two little boys settled into a tent all by herself and Gershom is whiny because everything is different and baby Eliezer is crying and Zipporah is at the end of her rope and wondering if maybe she just should have stayed with her Dad. And Jethro realizes that he's got to say something to his son-in-law.

(Slide 3: Ex 18:18)

I think Jethro was pretty wise, because it's not easy to give advice as an inlaw. First Jethro tells Moses that he's right -- everything that Moses is doing needs to be done -- yes, Moses, you are doing the right thing -- everything you are doing:

- representing the people before God
- bring their cases before God
- teaching them the statutes and instructions and
- making known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do... in this wilderness (18:19-20)

It's so important... that you need to recruit some help, in order be able to endure the demands of leadership and respond to the people's needs.

Jethro's advice is so positive, so affirming, and so true, that of course Moses listens.

I have to admit, this is not the sermon I was planning on preaching. I wanted to preach about recruiting leadership, and the importance of everyone stepping up, because I just can't do it all, but God kept sending me messages about grace, in my morning devotions, in articles and conversations with fellow clergy on Facebook (God speaks through facebook -- didn't I tell you, times have changed!)

I even got a fortune cookie this week that said, “behind every able man, is a team of able men.”

I think my fookie’s need to work on their gender bias(!), but I also think that what God wanted me to hear this week was articulated well by [Mirna Valerio](#)

(Slide 4: “Your worth is not determined by how much you can do for others.”)

“Your worth is not determined by how much you can do for others.”

Our worth is determined by God’s unconditional grace. We are all beloved children of God no matter what we do.

It makes me feel better that even Moses didn’t have all the answers and needed to ask for help, because...

I don’t have all the answers for these changing times.
Not for the church, not for my own life!

But I do have you.

I have my family and friends to help me get through life in these uncertain times,
and I have the able leaders and passionate volunteers of this church to share the journey through this wilderness of change.

I am so grateful, that we are the church, together.

Children’s Message

It’s good to ask for help.

You may have noticed that I’m kind of short for an adult?

So the top shelves in the grocery store are completely out of reach! And I like weird food, so it’s often on the top shelf!

So, what do you think I should do? Climb the shelves to get the food, use something long to knock what I want off the shelf, or ask somebody for help?

What are some things you need to ask for help with?

In our Bible reading for today, we are reminded that it's not a good idea to do everything by ourselves. God wants us to ask one another for help and to ask God for help.

Help is a great prayer!

Let's pray: God. Help. Thanks.