

2014_06_08 Pentecost
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

Who is Qualified to speak for the LORD?

(NO ONE)

yet...

Who is Authorized to speak for the LORD?

(THOSE WHOM THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS CHOSEN)

Numbers 11:24-30

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“But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11). Grace and peace to you. Amen.

The people want more. Its been over two years since they’ve left Egypt and the LORD has been faithful. He has showered them with manna from heaven; feeding them with daily bread in the desert. But they ask for more. They crave meat and seasonings and fruit; the things they once enjoyed in Egypt. So they cry out against Moses. They complain against Moses to the point where Moses can no longer carry the burden of this people by himself. So God responds by raising up elders to assist Moses in the work of ministering to the people as they journey to the promised land. We pick up at Numbers chapter 11, verse 24.

Numbers 11:24–30

²⁴ So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord, and he gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tabernacle. ²⁵ Then the Lord came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again.

²⁶ But two men had remained in the camp: the name of one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them. Now they were among those listed, but who had not gone out to the tabernacle; yet they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷ And a young man ran and told Moses, and said, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”

²⁸ So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, one of his choice men, answered and said, “Moses my lord, forbid them!”

29 Then Moses said to him, "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!" 30 And Moses returned to the camp, he and the elders of Israel.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

We pray: Oh LORD who has promised to pour our Your Holy Spirit upon us, fill us with Your Word and so comfort, encourage, and move us to right understanding of Your will. In Jesus name. Amen.

In that name which is above every name, at which every knee shall bow, dear fellow redeemed in the blood of Christ,

Imagine God looking out over a sea of people. He stands in heaven, looking over all creation and searching throughout all mankind to find those who will represent Him and speak on His behalf on earth. He has quite an assortment to choose from. He sees philosophers, emperors, religious scholars; He sees well known human rights activists and environmentalists, powerful CEO's and lawyers, successful motivational speakers and accomplished news anchors – whom will He choose to represent Him?

Who is qualified to speak for the LORD?

"Certainly not me," we think. "I hardly qualify to be a Christian, let alone be someone who speaks to others about the LORD. No, not me. I don't have a religious education; I was never good at memorizing Bible Passages; I'm terrified of public speaking; I am just not good with words; and my sinful past – well, my past makes it nearly impossible to think that God would want me to represent Him. I am just too ordinary; too weak; too sinful."

Do you feel unqualified to speak for the LORD? Well, maybe we are right. But maybe its not about being qualified but its about another question – not "am I qualified," but rather: "am I authorized?"

This morning we consider those two questions: who is qualified to speak for the LORD? ... AND ... who is authorized to speak for the LORD? And we look at three examples: we explore how do these questions apply to prophets like Eldad and Medad; we consider how these questions apply to apostles like Peter; and finally, we apply these questions to baptized believers like you and me?

1) Prophets like Eldad and Medad are unqualified, yet they are authorized by the Spirit

For whatever reason, they are stayed behind. We don't have much details about why Eldad and Medad did not go up to the tabernacle. They are among the seventy chosen from among the elders of Israel to aid Moses in this work. But for some reason, they remained in the camp and did not go up to the place of meeting. It appears they were not where they were supposed to be. Should they be disqualified?

Joshua wonders. Here Joshua had been serving Moses faithfully since his youth. A better translation of verse 28 is: "Joshua, son of Nun, Moses' assistant since His youth." Joshua had been faithful to Moses all his life and now he finds these two men, apart from Moses, not where they were supposed to be, prophesying in the camp. Surely they are not qualified for this work. Surely they should be with Moses, receiving instruction and training about how this is to be done, how one is to speak and act as a prophet and elder. Joshua was where he was supposed to be; and so he thinks these men need to be shushed.

He may be right that they are not where they are supposed to be. He might have felt it unfair that they would do this apart from Moses' approval. Yet Moses responds, "Are you jealous?" Moses recognizes that real question is not whether or not they are qualified – but whether or not they are authorized. Has the Lord chosen these men? In the end, it was a reminder to Joshua, that none of those chosen deserved it. Not even Joshua, who served faithfully since His youth was truly qualified to take on this great work. Instead the LORD authorizes and pours out His Spirit by grace making this His calling alone to give.

The work of the Spirit is not something to shush. The fact remains that they were among those listed. They were among those chosen. They were among the seventy called into this ministry. And they were authorized by God's Spirit who rested upon them.

God's work is a work of grace, which takes these ordinary men and does extraordinary things. He reaches into a situation where he finds people not where we are supposed to be, and pours out forgiveness and life. He pours out His Spirit when, where, and upon whom He wills. He brings them to His purpose. Authorization to speak for the Lord is something the Holy Spirit gives to ordinary sinners by choosing them, making them Holy, and filling them with the word of Christ.

2) Apostles like Peter are unqualified, yet they are authorized by the Spirit

The same sort of question might be asked of the twelve apostles. When Peter stands up to speak on Pentecost we see the reaction from the people: they must be drunk. Are not all these who speak Galileans? Are these men qualified to speak for the LORD?

The question takes us to the back waters of Galilee where we find the most ordinary, uneducated, unlikely of men. They do not come from the center of religious thinking in Israel. They are not found in Jerusalem among the religious scholars of their day. They are found fishing. They come from Galilee: a melting pot of Jews and Gentiles; tradesmen, carpenters, shepherds, fishermen, tax collectors and sinners. God looks out over all creation, searching for whom He will use to speak His word and He chooses fishermen.

Peter's response to the Lord's calling is accurate: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." The apostles would demonstrate how unqualified they were for this work. Story after story proves it. They are confused when their Lord tells them He must die; fearful when a storm arises on the sea of Galilee; prideful as they begin debating over who is the greatest; careless when they rebuke parents who are trying to bring their children to Jesus; unfaithful when Jesus prays and they sleep; selfish when Jesus is taken captive and led away to be crucified; and when He rises just as He promised, they do not believe it.

They come from the backwaters of Galilee. Yet from these ordinary, weak, unqualified disciples, God will do His extraordinary work. He calls them into His work and pours out His Spirit upon them so that Peter finds confidence to stand up and speak for the Lord. In our confusion, in our fears, in our pride, in our carelessness, in our unfaithfulness, in our selfishness – God proves Himself alone to be the author of our salvation and authority of our calling. It must be Jesus' work as He overcomes our sins and our failures by carrying out His cross bound call to suffer hell. He proves His qualifications – righteous and holy in all He says and does. He is qualified – to suffer for us, to redeem us by His blood, to rise from the dead. And so all authority is given to Him in heaven and on earth and with it He says to us, "Go, therefore, and preach the gospel to every creature." He reaches into ordinary, every day sinful lives and raise up prophets, evangelists and Christian witnesses.

So Peter stands up, raises his voice, and speaks. The Holy Spirit has been poured out, filling the room with His calling and opens the mouths of these ordinary, uneducated men. Peter stands up, raises his voice, and speaks the words of the prophet: "It shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh."

Authorization to speak for the Lord is something the Holy Spirit gives to ordinary sinners by choosing them, making them Holy, and filling them with the word of Christ.

3) Baptized believers like you and me are unqualified, yet they are authorized by the Spirit

So what about you and me? Do we come from the backwaters? Does God find us where we are not supposed to be?

There is a temptation to shush those who seem unqualified – ourselves included. Our weaknesses, our sins make it seem impossible that God would choose me to do speak for Him. I am just an ordinary Christian; and hardly much of a Christian at that.

Yet, God reaches out to Eldad and Medad. He finds us where we are not supposed to be and puts us where He wants us. He reaches out to the backwaters of Galilee. He takes ordinary, sinful, weak Christians, and makes them holy by the blood of Jesus. He pours our His Spirit in the waters of baptism and in the preaching of His word so that you are authorized to speak for Him. Through water and the word, the Spirit is poured out so that we are authorized – as Peter says: “to proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9).

Unqualified as we all are, any baptized believer is authorized to speak the gospel and express our Christian faith to the world. It might not always sound exactly the same – in different words, different styles of worship, in different personalities and gifts, the same Spirit is being poured out and raising up disciples to speak His Word.

Of course the nature of this ministry is not the same as that of a prophet or apostle. We do not receive direct revelation; visions; dreams. God doesn't speak to us directly; rather we receive the Spirit through a medium.

We should remember that unlike the prophets and apostles, God authorizes us through means; that is to say, rather than sending us visions and dreams, He visits us in the Word; in the Word is where we are authorized to speak for the Lord. This means that we speak only where the Lord has spoken, and where the Lord has not spoken, Christians have no authority to speak. For this reason, let us know our Bibles and be filled with the Spirit by hearing, learning, and meditating upon the words of Christ. Let us gather, just like those elders in the tabernacle, just like the disciples in the upper room on Pentecost. We receive our confidence here where we respond with Moses: Oh that all the LORD's people would speak and that He would put His Spirit on them.

Authorization to speak for the Lord is something the Holy Spirit gives to ordinary sinners by choosing them, making them Holy, and filling them with the word of Christ.

God looks out over a sea of people. He stands in heaven, looking over all creation and searching throughout all mankind to find those who will represent Him and speak on His behalf on earth. He has quite an assortment from which to choose – philosophers, emperors, religious scholars – yet whom does He choose? Those who are not where they are supposed to be like Eldad and Medad; confused and weak apostles like Peter; ordinary sinners like you and me. Despite our weaknesses, sins, and failures; despite how unqualified we are to speak for the LORD, He forgives our sins for Jesus sake and gives us His Holy Spirit; The question to ask is not “am I qualified?” But, “am I authorized?” The Spirit authorizes and compels every baptized believer to stand up with Peter and speak; to proclaim the gospel in word and exemplifying the love of Christ in deed that more might know call upon the name of the Lord – for we know that whoever calls upon the name of the LORD will be saved. Amen.