

**Grace Episcopal Church, Galena Illinois
September 30, 2012**

**Sermon by Rev. Gloria Hopewell, D.Min.
Texts- Numbers 11: 24-29, Mark 9: 38-50**

I am not proud of what I'm about to tell you. But maybe some of you can relate. There was a man in seminary with me. In fact, he was from my church. I did not find him to be particularly brilliant. But he was a physician. And he seemed to glide right through seminary in less time than it took for the rest of us. Some of us had suspicions that because of his M.D., he was given special dispensations. Later, as I was on the last leg of my doctoral studies – completing my research and writing the thesis, he told me that he had already received his Doctor of Ministry. He did this through a school I had never heard of that seemed to be a combination of online study, credit for life experience, and a rather simplistic approach to the thesis.

Well. I was, I suppose, annoyed by this. No, I was downright resentful. My own program was quite rigorous and my tendency for overfunctioning made it more so. How could someone take the easy road and still end up with the same letters after his name, the same credentials on his resume? It just didn't seem fair.

And lest you think I have outgrown this characteristic, well, no. Last week, when we learned that the wedding that preceded our reception at LinMar Gardens had suffered a no-show officiant – one who got credentials on the Internet, I must confess to a little gloating.

Maybe it's that Protestant work ethic I inherited from my German ancestors. Or, maybe, it's wanting credit equal to the effort. Or, maybe it's just an ungenerous desire to set myself apart, to be special.

I wonder if this was similar to how the disciples felt in today's Gospel reading – wanting to be special, part of Jesus' group. They had been engaged in an intense internship with Jesus – a long field education stint where they heard the teachings first hand and had been commissioned for healing and exorcising demons. Not long before this story, they had failed at the latter, trying to rid a young boy of the evil spirits that tormented him.

Then they encountered another exorcist who seemed successful – and did his work in Jesus' name! But he was no one they knew. No one who had been on their path of sacrifice and commitment. He was not "following us." So, they told him to stop. And then, they told Jesus, probably expecting him to applaud them. Instead, Jesus said, "Do not stop him.... Whoever is not against us is for us."

Centuries earlier, Moses ran into a similar situation. This is from the alternative text for today which was not read this morning. It is from the book of Numbers and tells of Moses in the wilderness with the Israelites at a time when they were complaining and calling out

for meat instead of the boring daily manna that God had provided. Moses had had it. He was done, up to his eyeballs with all of the whining. He said to God, "Look, I didn't want to do this to begin with, but you insisted. You gave me these people. But I can't do it anymore. The load is just too heavy."

So God told him to select 70 elders from the community and send them to the tabernacle. There God gave each of the elders a portion of Moses' spirit so that they could help carry the load. They came out of the tabernacle and prophesied.

But there were two men—Eldad and Medad—who were not among the 70. They were elsewhere in the camp, but the Spirit rested on them, anyway, and they began to prophesy. Joshua, Moses' deputy, objected and asked Moses to tell them to stop. Instead, Moses said, "I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit in them."

Jesus said, "Do not stop him.... Whoever is not against us is for us." Moses said, "I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit in them." We are reminded that the Spirit moves where it will, not necessarily in the ways we expect or desire. And it takes more than just the few to spread the Gospel. It takes all of us—those here, those in other faith communities, and those who have not yet walked through our doors.

Last weekend, we experienced splendid events here at Grace. There was a lot of pomp and circumstance—a surplus of clergy—bishop, dean, priest and deacons from the deanery and dioceses of Chicago and Iowa. Vestments and processions. Probably the first ordination ever held at Grace.

But I hope that the deeper meaning of our liturgies glowed through these Celebrations of New Ministry. That deeper meaning is the ministry of all baptized, not just the ministry of the ordained. It is the Episcopal Church's first order of ministry represented by every single person who participated—as acolytes, lectors, greeters, ushers, musicians, altar guild, bread bakers; those planning, cooking and baking, serving, and cleaning up after the celebratory meals; those planting flowers, trimming the lawns, patching concrete and changing lightbulbs; those singing the hymns, praying the prayers, and coming to the Lord's table.

As part of my institution as your rector, we all reaffirmed our baptismal vows. Then, we did it again as part of the baptism on Sunday. We recalled our own baptisms—even if we were too young to actually remember, even if the words or the rite were a bit different and the promises were made by parents or sponsors. We recalled that we were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and were sealed as Christ's own, forever. Sealed to share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

But even more than recalling a past event, we were asked to reaffirm those vows. Did you think about them as you said, "I will with God's help?" We stated our belief in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We promised to continue in the teaching, fellowship, breaking

of bread, and prayer. To resist evil and repent. To proclaim by word and example the Good News. To seek and serve Christ in all persons. And to strive for justice and peace and respect the dignity of every human being.

Jesus said, "Whoever is not against us is for us." How does this connect with our baptismal vows?

My attitude toward the man in seminary and the internet clergy, the disciples and Joshua's reactions toward those not "officially" part of their groups could be seen as petty and childish. But it also was a way of testing boundaries. We are to love our neighbor and to respect their dignity, but who should be permitted to use the name of Jesus?

That becomes difficult in our complex and pluralistic world, doesn't it? It is an issue at the extremes when someone with a particular religious agenda and understanding takes a gun into a church, synagogue, or mosque and shoots worshipers. Or when religious groups picket churches and military funerals in the name of Christ while carrying signs with messages about who God hates.

It is difficult, too, in our own churches that have split over different ways of understanding scripture. Our Diocese of Quincy is an example of such division and pain. In other mainline churches, groups have intentionally planned takeovers by becoming members and rapidly joining the leadership, then pulling the church out of the denomination and down a less progressive path.

And what about our individual parishes? Who do we welcome and invite? Mostly those who are like ourselves? And after we've welcomed them, who do we include in our smaller groups? Do we make room for the ideas and gifts they bring, even when they are different from what we have been doing?

Who gets to use Jesus' name?

I do not have an easy answer. I guess each one of us must wrestle with this. For me, though, the closest I can come is to look at the fruits of others' words and actions. And, I think, our baptismal vows can help with this – do the words and actions serve Christ in all persons? Do they proclaim the Good News of God in Christ? Do they further justice and peace and respect the dignity of all?

May we strive always to live into our promises.

Amen and amen.