

Cruising in the Nave?

Numbers 11^{4-6,10-16,24-29}; Psalm 197^{-end}; James 5^{13-end}; Mark 9^{38-end}

Moses said to him, Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit on them! [Numbers 11²⁹]

When I read Numbers and the people complaining about all the foods they had known in Egypt but now was missing from their diet of manna - **cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions** and **garlic** - I understood something of what they were thinking. The nutritionists amongst us will have observed that all of these have a high water content or are a diuretic! Important things in the dessert.

I remember it feeling like my life had been saved by a cucumber! I had walked some miles off-road in the mountains in Nepal and had run out of water. When I arrived at the road there was no bottled water and no soft drinks - only a cart selling cucumbers: how refreshing they were and sustaining. That is why I have some sympathy with the Hebrews.

It is always interesting to explore any verses that the compilers of the Lectionary miss out - usually it is because it is too rude or presents God in a questionable light. In this instance God and Moses have a chat and God is annoyed. He says, **Therefore the Lord will give you meat and you shall eat. You shall not eat only one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, but for a whole month - until it comes out your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you - because you have rejected the Lord who is among you and have wailed before him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?"**

Moses is brave and says that this is a lot for God to take on! God's blood is up and he responds, **Is the Lord's power limited? Now you shall see whether my word will come true or not!**

What follows is a session in God's presence with Moses and all the Elders. They had a unique experience of God and **the spirit rested upon them** and **they prophesied**, but goes on to say **they did not do so again!**

How quickly even a great leader in the making as **Joshua** fossilises events or positions a religious jobsworth protecting what they thought that mattered.

He was aware that **Eldad and Medad** were two chaps who were not at the official event at the Tabernacle but **the spirit rested on them**. He is blunt (he hasn't prayed with the Psalmist, **keep your servant from**

presumptuous sins) and wants an end to spiritual initiative: **Moses, stop them!** Moses is more generous and says, **Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!**

It is important that we are certain in our minds that this is a Church and not a theatre: we are in this together (the Latin that gives rise to the *Nave* in which we sit is the word for a ship - and it is one in which we are all employed rather than passengers).

Jesus is generous to those who are casting out demons in his name, but not disciples.

- ✠ Jesus response is, **do not stop him; for no-one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.** The simple fact is that Christianity isn't about drawing exclusive lines: **whoever gives a cup of water to drink because you bear that name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.**

James too shows us how each of us can be involved - all of us, as we are able:

- ✠ How do we respond to the things that happen to us? When we are **suffering**, or **cheerful** or **sick** what do we do? Too often it is to complain, misery or complain! James suggests that the response is to **pray**, to **sing** and to **call the elders** and to have an **anointing with oil** and that the **prayer of faith will save you.** Perhaps it is time for us to consider a healing ministry to offer just this at our services at the communion?
- ✠ How do we respond when we **sin**? I think most of us revert to being school children and hope that no-one ever finds out and we either deny everything or blame someone else. How often do we take the option James suggests: **confess your sins to one another?**
- ✠ How do we respond when **someone wanders from the truth**? It is a privilege to be able to **cover a multitude of sins** and that is what we do when someone is brought back to God's grace! God is so generous that his superfluity is in danger of coming down our nostrils! I am surprised that James doesn't go on to say that we endanger our own spiritual well-being by ignoring that of others!

It would be a refreshing as a cucumber if the Church was staffed with a working crew rather than spiritual cruisers!