

# WHAT IF WE ALL DID THAT?

Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29

September 27, 2009

(Proper 21, Yr B)

**But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**

I love that passage from 1 Peter. I do. It's one of my favorites. "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood," says Peter. "Once you were no people, now you are God's people." Once you were nobody, now you are somebody. You are God's own.... Wonderful words! And do you know who they're for? They're for you. This is God's word for God's people -- it's God's word for you.

But now that I've said that, let me tell you a little story that has absolutely nothing to do with *any* of that. It's about an old farmer. I don't know his name. But he was a good, decent, hard-working man. The salt of the earth. Lived there on the farm with his wife for years and years.

And she was ... she was something else is what she was. An attractive woman, I suppose. But she had a voice that made people think of fingernails on a blackboard, Styrofoam on glass, or the sound you hear when a cat gets its tail under a rocking chair! And she had an attitude to match, they say. The woman nagged constantly. From morning till evening she'd complain and criticize and just go on and on about the least little thing.

One day, she went to the grocery store. And they were having a big sale on peanut butter. So she got some peanut butter and a few other things, went through the checkout counter, and complained about the bag boy squashing her bread. She said it wouldn't fit in the toaster. It would get hung up in there because it was misshapen. "And it won't pop up when it's supposed to pop up. And it'll catch on fire and burn the whole house down ... and the tool shed ... and the barn." And they'll go broke and have to sell their farm and move to Minnesota and live with her niece. "And I don't *like* Minnesota," she said. "It's too cold! It snows every day but the fourth of July!" And it would make her arthritis flare up, she said. And

she'd have to take to her bed where she would wither away and die... Because he mashed her bread bagging the groceries!

And after that she went home. And when she got home, she called the store and said, "I bought peanut butter!"

The grocer said, "Pardon me, ma'am?"

"I bought peanut butter!" she said. "What am I supposed to do with it now?"

And the poor man at the store said, "I don't understand?"

She said, "You had peanut butter on sale—buy two, get one free. I bought the two and got one free, and now I don't have anything to do with it!"

"Well, I'm really sorry, ma'am, but that's not the store's fault."

"Well, what am I supposed to do with it?!"

He had a few suggestions in my mind but thought it might not be good to say them out loud. He said, "Put it on a sandwich?"

And she snapped back, "Young man, do you have any idea how many calories are in two tablespoons of peanut butter? Two-hundred!" she said. "Two hundred calories!"

"Ma'am, I'm sorry. I don't really know what to tell you to do with your peanut butter."

And she said, "I don't care! If you don't tell me what to do with it right now, I'm going to complain to your manager and have you fired!"

He didn't have the heart to tell her that it was *his* store. But before he could say anything, she said, "What am I supposed to do with the peanut butter?!"

He said, "I don't know, make cookies with it? Give a jar to a friend? Donate it to the church's food pantry?"

"Are you crazy?! I paid good money for this stuff. I'm not going to just give it away. What's the matter with you young people!?" And with that she hung up on him!

And *that's* what the old farmer had to live with. Every *day*. The only time he got any relief from her constant complaining was when he was out plowing with his old mule. Which he tried to do an awful lot of, I think. And one day, when he was out plowing, his wife brought him lunch in the field. So he drove the old mule into the shade, sat down on a stump, and began to eat his lunch. Peanut butter, more than likely. But whatever it was, his wife immediately started nagging and complaining. I mean, she just went on and on. Until all of a sudden, the old mule reared up and kicked her with both hind feet. Caught her right smack in the back of the head.... Killed her dead.

A few days later, at the funeral home, the preacher noticed something peculiar. When a woman would approach the old farmer, he would listen for a minute. And then he'd nod his head in agreement. But when a man would walk up to him, he'd listen for a minute and then shake his head as if he didn't agree. And it was the same every time. He'd nod "Yes" to the women and "no" to the men.

So after the funeral, the preacher asked the old farmer why he did this -- why he nodded his head and agreed with the women, but always shook his head and disagreed with the men. And the old gentleman farmer looked at the preacher and said, "Well sir, the women would come up and say something about how nice my wife looked, or how pretty her dress was, so I'd nod in agreement."

"What about the men?" asked the preacher.

And the old farmer looked at him and said, "They wanted to know if the mule was for sale." ✕

Moses was a bit like that old farmer, you know. He heard an awful lot of complaining. Not from his wife, mind you. From *everybody*. The Hebrew people. The children of Israel. God's chosen people. The whole *lot* of them, mind you. They just weren't *happy*, at all! I mean, first it was the water. They didn't *have* any, they said. And then, when they did, it was too bitter to drink. So they whined about that. And they were hungry. They said, "**You** just brought

us out here to starve us, didn't you? We'd be better off dead -- or in slavery again."

So God fed them. Gave them **manna** from heaven. They didn't have to plow, or sow seeds, or go to Sam's and buy it in bulk. God just gave it to them. Let it "rain down from heaven." Every day, mind you! And all they had to do was gather it up and bake it or boil it or whatever they did.

And they *still* complained! "We don't like the menu," they said. "We want something different. We're tired of this stuff. We're tired of the same meal seven days a week. Mix it up a little," they said. "Give us something different. How about a little meat? How about some garlic?" Really! They said that! "When we were slaves we had **melons** and **cucumbers** and **leeks** and **onions** and **garlic**! But now all we have is *this ... stuff*! And it's all the same! We'd be better off back in Egypt! We may have been slaves," they said. "But at least we had a little variety on the menu!" And they were *serious* about this! Crying and whining and nagging and going on and on. And when God heard it ... he wasn't happy! To think after

all he had done for them they'd have the gall to say, "We were better off in Egypt... when we were slaves!?"

So ... God was angry and the people were angry. And Moses heard about it! From the people *and* God. I mean, **nobody** was happy. ✘ And poor Moses had just had it! Things couldn't get any worse. "I can't take it!" he said. **"I'm your servant, Lord. I'm on your side. Remember? So why are you doing this to me? I mean, what have I done to deserve this? You've made me responsible for all these people, but they're not my children. You told me to nurse them along and carry them through the desert to this land you promised their ancestors. But they keep whining for garlic and onions ... and meat. Where am I supposed to get meat for all of them?"**

**"I can't take it," he said. "This job is too much for me. How am I supposed to take care of all these people by myself? If this is the way you're going to treat me, Lord, then just kill me now. Put me out of my misery!"**

And God answered him. God said, **"Moses, pick seventy elders -- leaders, people who are respected, mind**

you. And go to the tabernacle (the sacred tent) with them. And I'll take some of the same Spirit that rests on you and put it on them. They can help bear the load and share the responsibility.”

So the elders went to the holy place with Moses. And they all stood in a circle around the tent. And God gave them the Spirit. And they all started to prophesy. It means they all started speaking out for God, proclaiming God's message.

But it wasn't just the ones at the tent, mind you. There were two men on the list who didn't show up. I don't know why. They just didn't. But the Spirit came to them anyway. And they started speaking out for God, too -- right where they were. Which came as a shock to some of the people around them, I guess. And they weren't too happy about it. So they ran to Moses and said, **“Eldad and Medad are doing God's work. You've got to stop them, Moses. They're speaking out for God!”**

But Moses wasn't *about* to stop them. Instead he looked at them and said, **“You think I'm jealous? You**

**think I don't want this? I wish the Lord would give his Spirit to *all* his people so everyone could speak out for the Lord!”**

But can you imagine? What would happen if *everybody* did that? What if we *all* had that Spirit? What if we all spoke out for God? What would that be like? ✕

Did you hear what Peter said? 1 Peter 2:9? It says, **But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**

Moses got his wish. His dream came true. Because it wasn't just his dream, or *his* desire ... it was God's. ✕ Remember what happened when Jesus died on the cross? The veil of the temple, the holy place, was torn in two from top to bottom to send a message to all of God's people that God doesn't just dwell in the temple now. You won't just find him behind the curtain. But God is everywhere. In all places, at all times. God will be with you wherever you are.

And then there was Pentecost. It was just a few weeks later. And do you remember what happened? The Spirit filled the whole house and it touched who? Everyone! The Spirit was given to *all* the believers so that they'd be equipped -- so they'd have the power and authority to go out and tell the good news of God's love to others.

And that same Spirit is given to you. That same Holy Spirit rests upon you and dwells within you. And that means your baptism was something like an ordination. It said, **“You are God's own. You are his son, you are his daughter. And God gives you the Spirit so that you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. So that you might go and speak and act and live in such a way that your life speaks out to others. So that you can carry the message and tell others about this amazing God who loves them so much he gave his own Son for them. And that he wants nothing more than to share that love with them and give them a new life -- a life in his love that will never end.**

That's who you are. You are the fulfillment of Moses' dream. You are the fulfillment of God's dream for the world.

**You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**

A young woman named Jerry was working in the kitchen one day at the church in Huntington. And they always kept the outer door locked there, because Marcum Terrace was just over the hill. It's a housing project. Full of drugs and violence.... And Jerry was there in the kitchen, alone, preparing a meal for the children who would be there a bit later for their version of WOW.

And she heard something out on the street. Some kids. Not from the church, mind you ... or the neighborhood. But from the looks of them they must have come from over the hill. From the housing projects. And Jerry was not a *seasoned* Christian. She didn't grow up in the church like many of us. Not that she wasn't a good person. She

was. One of the kindest people I've ever known ... even *before* she became a disciple. ✠

So she heard the kids out there and she opened the door and went out to the street. And she asked them if they were hungry. And one of them, DJ, said, "Yes." So she told him to come back in about an hour and eat with them in the church.

And all the kids gathered in the social hall, just like they do here. And there was DJ. And he wasn't alone. His little brother was there. And his two sisters. The youngest one was seven or eight. And her name was Britney. And Britney had such a wonderful time that she asked if they could come back again. And she did. They all did. Every Wednesday night they were there. And every Sunday morning, someone would pick them up and bring them to Sunday School and church.

And it turns out they *didn't* live over the hill at the housing project. But they lived in an old condemned and abandoned house. And they were without heat and had very little to eat. So Jerry and Ann and some of the other

people at church would take food to their house... and warm clothes and blankets. Because they just fell in love with these kids. ✠ Some people didn't.... They were dirty, they said. And they were. Their clothes were old and worn. And they could be a little noisy at times, because they had never been in a church before – in *any* church.

But they loved it... They made friends with the other kids. And they loved the singing and the stories on Wednesday night. And they just loved it when people would smile at them or put their arms round them and tell them how happy they were to see them. Because they weren't just hungry for pizza and tacos and hot dogs... those kids were hungry for love.

And the week of Thanksgiving, the little one, Britney, did something wonderful. She made thank you notes, on her own, for the leaders of the Wednesday night group. She gave one to Jerry that said, "Thank you for the delicious food. Britney." And there was a PS at the bottom. It said, "Thank you for the hugs and smiles, too!" And she gave one to Ann that said, "Thank you for picking us up and driving the van and bringing us clothes." And

there was one to the song leader that said, “Thank you for letting me sing. I love singing in church.” And she gave me one, I still have it, that said, “Thank you for being my friend.”

And there was one more note. It was to everybody, I think. Or maybe it was for God. We found it there in the church one day. It said, **“Thank you for Jesus. He’s my friend and he loves me and I love him, too.”** And it said, **“I’m going to bring all my friends here so they can be friends with Jesus, too.”**

And she did. They all did. They brought their friends... And the church grew with children. More and more children were coming. And sometimes some of their parents would come to Sunday School and church. And for the first time some of those parents heard about a God who loves them. A God who *wants* to be in *their* lives. And they heard about Jesus -- the One who gave his life that they might be forgiven and accepted and at home with God.

And you know why that happened? It happened because Jerry and Britney and the others had the same Spirit that Moses and the seventy elders had. The same Spirit that made a group of timid, frightened followers of Jesus carry the Good News everywhere they could. The same Spirit that turned the world upside down in Jesus’ name. And they had the Spirit (or the Spirit had them) not because they’d been to seminary or took some leadership class... or because they had diplomas and certificates on their office walls. Not even because they had the gift of gab or just “had a way with people.” They had the Spirit because it’s all part of God’s dream that all God’s people will speak out for him and be filled with his Spirit.

So you have it, too. You have the Spirit and the Spirit has you because **You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people.**

So remember that. Remember who you are ... and let others see your good works and know your love and your

care, so that they will come to know this amazing God who loves them (and us) so much.

Can you do that?

Will you do that?

Then so be it.

This is the word which is given for you. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

Benen, ObSB

