

## Unified in Grumbling and in Receiving Grace

10<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 08/01/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.  
Text: Exodus 16:2-15 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 12 [The LORD said,] **“I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God’.”**

### **Introduction**

- ✘ It’s very common for us all, in this earthly life, to look only at the present and the future while we forget or discount the past. We see it in politics, business and academics when, for example a president has done an outstanding job leading the country through a war or a recession, but now years later that fact is forgotten; or a business developed a ground-breaking product that moved their entire industry forward only to be completely discounted once their competitors catch up and offer the same product today, though they could have never figured out how before. And we see it in our own lives as we fail to learn from our mistakes or seem unable to remember the countless blessings we’ve received that have made us who we are today.
  - ➔ Instead, people are quick to demand the answer to this, “What have you done lately?”
- ✘ Similarly, with respect to God we might hear, or even say ourselves, “Yes, God sent His Son into the world to die on the cross and rise from the grave. But that was more than 2000 years ago. What has God done lately?”

### **I. How Soon We forget!**

- ✘ The striking thing about the account we have before us in our Old Testament Reading from the book of Exodus is that it happened more than 3,400 years ago, but the people’s reaction is something that every one of us sees in ourselves and those around us to this very day.
  - ➔ Those Israelites had been miraculously rescued out of Egypt by God only a month or two earlier, yet their memory of His amazing provision and grace seems to be completely gone.
- ✘ In our Epistle Reading from Ephesians, chapter four, Paul talks about us using God’s gifts and provision in His Church to “attain to the unity of the faith” and the “fullness of Christ” (Eph. 13).
  - ➔ But we see here in Exodus and in our own lives how the people of God, when we allow sin to take us over, as it did with the Israelites, can end up unified instead in “grumbling” against those very leaders and the gifts that God has given to us. In fact, Moses pulls no punches in verse eight when he says to the people, “Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD”.
- ✘ As you and I read this story in the Bible it comes right out and slaps us in the face how short the memories were of those people. They witnessed incredible and miraculous deeds, the kind we only see in movies like *The Ten Commandments*: The ten plagues, the angel of death passing over their homes just because they had smeared blood up and over and down their door posts, the dividing of the Red Sea and the complete drowning of Pharaoh’s army as they were pursued.
  - ➔ How could they every doubt God again? And yet the Israelites responded, “that was then; this is now. What have You done lately God?”
- ✘ It’s a blatant display of their failure to remember the past as it has shaped their current situation; an inability to be content. They complained about the lack of food generally and the lack of meat specifically.

- And in the process they questioned the motives of Moses and totally embellished the good points of their time when they were enslaved in Egypt!
- ✘ Does any of this sound even a little bit familiar to the way that we live and act today as the people of God? We come to church Sunday after Sunday and we hear the proclamation and preaching of the cross of Christ. We receive the Lord's declaration of absolution; the promise of forgiveness and salvation from our bondage to sin and death, and we are fed the Lord's Supper where we receive His grace and strength and so much more.
  - But then too often we respond to that grace like the Israelites – unified in our ignorance and questioning because we have lost touch with the LORD so that if anyone were to ever ask us about those things that the pastor and elder place in our hands and upon our tongues, our response might not be much different than what we hear in verse 15, "What is it?"
  - Then we go back out into our daily lives and we live as if God does not exist, let alone living with the conviction that God has done anything of real significance for us lately.
- ✘ No, instead we grumble! We grumble over finances, family, the standard of living, how difficult our lives are – even though only a few days earlier the Almighty God over all Creation came to us directly and personally in His own miraculous, Word and Sacrament way!
  - We shouldn't be surprised if God were to just shake His head and turn His back on us all.

## II. How Readily God Responds in Grace

- ✘ But the way that God reacts to the Israelites is very instructive for us all these years later, today. Even as the people forgot about and grumbled against God; even though He had every right to respond with righteous indignation and say things like, "How dare you doubt My work and love!" or "You ungrateful creatures!" or "After all that I have done for you!", what does God do?
  - He responds instead in His characteristic extraordinary lovingkindness and grace in a twofold manner; showing that He alone is the Giver of every good and perfect gift.
- ✘ First, He promised what would be a 40-year supply of bread (and meat) from heaven for their physical bodies. Yes, God provided those Israelites with all that they needed, as Martin Luther puts it in his explanation to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed, "with all that I need to support this body and life".
  - Verse eight describes both the quail every evening and the Manna every morning as God's gift of "bread from heaven". And He rationed it out in daily portions, Sunday through Friday, with a double portion on Friday so that they could "rest" on the Sabbath.
  - Why? So that they would learn to be truly content with where they were at each day; so they would completely trust and depend upon the fact that God will always provide what they truly need. You see, if they had been able to actually save the manna for multiple days in advance, they would then place their trust in their own gathering and preserving and storing abilities rather than upon God and His gifts.
- ✘ This was not just a one-time event; not just a display of power for God to show His dominance. No, this is the very thing that Jesus was getting at when He taught His disciples, including you and me, to pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread"; not tomorrow's bread, but today's bread.
  - This "bread" which Luther lists out and explains in the Small Catechism includes all that we need to support our bodily life; things like "clothing, shoes, house, home, ... money, goods, ... good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like".

- ✘ The second grace-filled manner in which God responds to the people, and to us today, is with the promise of bread from heaven for our souls. In fact, in verse four the LORD promises, “I am about to rain bread from heaven for you...”, which means His gifts; His grace will come in abundance!
  - ➔ You see, God’s promise to the people so many years ago was so much more than just the promise that He would provide bread to nourish our bodies. His promise here is actually that He will provide as well THE “true bread from heaven” that we hear Jesus proclaim of Himself in verses 32-33 of today’s Gospel Reading (Jn. 6). Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world”. This is Jesus of course; the “bread of life” who gives not only food for the body but also food for the soul.
- ✘ There are several instructive analogies for us in all of this today. Unlike the manna that would only last one day or two at the most, Jesus is the bread that gives us eternal life. Unlike the bread provided for by Moses, this is nourishment provided for us by the Son of God.
  - ➔ This bread is given to you and me as well “in, with and under” the bread and wine of the Supper of grace which we see prepared and ready before us there in the Sacrament of the Altar.
- ✘ Jesus continues day after day; every day to give you and me the very thing that we need to carry us through our earthly pilgrimage, whether it ends up being 40 years, 20 years, 80 or 100 years until the day when He calls and carries us into the Promised Land of His eternal presence in heaven.
  - ➔ And yes, there have been, and there will continue to be times, that it may seem like a desert wilderness, this life in which we live; times of great trial and grief; times where we might be tempted to look at what’s going on and ask as the Israelites did, “What is this?” (v. 15).
  - ➔ But because we have God’s Word of Promise here today, brothers and sisters, I assure you, in Jesus, the Bread of Life, that we have been unified with believers of all time in receiving God’s grace in abundance; as rain from heaven.

## Conclusion

- ✘ So, what’s God done lately? ...for you? ...for me? Have you got a few hours...or days for me to list it all?
  - ➔ Here in this text we see that God has provided Moses, just as He does proclaimers of God’s truth today to unify us in the saving faith of Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life.
  - ➔ He provides us all with the needs of our body; things like air to breathe, water and food to drink and eat. He provides His love and the opportunity to give and receive that love with those around us. He provides support and care from our fellow believers in Christ.
  - ➔ And He provides every spiritual need for this earthly life of faith and for our heavenly life in perfection.
- ✘ In this great joy and confession, you and I dear Christians, have been unified together and blessed with the true Bread from heaven.
  - ➔ In the name of “the LORD our God” (v.12); the Father; the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.