



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

“Nothing but this Stinkin’ Manna!””

Rev. David K. Groth

“The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, ‘If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost-- also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!’” (Numbers 11:6).

September 30, 2012

GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH & SCHOOL

1611 East Main Street
Watertown, Wisconsin 53094

Return Service Requested

Collect of the Day

Everlasting Father, source of every blessing, mercifully direct and govern us by Your Holy Spirit that we may complete the works You have prepared for us to do; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Over the summers during college I worked for the Delevan-Darien school district, painting and doing roof work. My immediate supervisor was a fellow by the name of Butch, a man hardened by years and years of working on flat, leaky roofs in the heat of summer. He was a master, not so much of roof work, but of grumbling. He was a walking thesaurus of slang. It was an art form for him, and roof work provided many opportunities to practice his art. When your gloves are stuck together by a black bonding agent that has the consistency of well-chewed bubble gum . . . when you're an inch taller on the roof, because your shoes are caked with pea gravel . . . when hot tar fills your nostrils and finds its way into your hair, it's easy to curse and grumble and slander and gripe.

Truth is, whatever our vocations, it's easy to do that, because grumbling is one of the things we do best. In the Bible we know that sin is sin and there really isn't a pecking order to it in the Lord's eyes. Still, we tend to think of grumbling as a lesser sin, a peccadillo, and we fixate more on the shocking the sensational, the sexual sins for instance. But we deceive ourselves. In the Bible, grumbling is a quick way to stir up the Lord's anger.

Our text says, "the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel wept again and said, "Oh that we had meat to eat! We remember the rich buffet lines we enjoyed as slaves in Egypt." Isn't it remarkable how memory plays tricks on us? And isn't it remarkable how ungrateful God's people can be. Earlier, they were crying for food and God graciously heard them and started providing manna from heaven. It fell like dew in the night. "It tasted like bread made with honey" they said. They received it gratefully, at first. But soon the rabble among them grew discontent with it, and they began to loathe it, and consider it a curse.

After all, what is the Lord to do with us when we even grow weary even of his gifts, his blessings?

What he does with us is what he did with his ancient people. He punishes us, for sure, but he does not turn his back on us. He disciplines, but he does not consume us. To his grumbling people of old, he would give them their meat. In fact, he would nearly bury them in quail, quote, “until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the LORD” (v. 20).

God still disciplines us, as a father disciplines his child, but He doesn't give full vent to his wrath for that would wipe us out. He reserves that unrestrained wrath for Good Friday. Calvary is where the Lord's anger blazed hotly. Calvary, is where the wrath was consuming. “Why hast thou forsaken me?” Jesus cried. It's because God didn't forsake his people in the desert, and it's because God hasn't forsaken us, though we have earned it a thousand times over with our grumbling. The cross is where all accounts were balanced, where the consequences of our sin were paid, where our deepest needs for forgiveness and eternal life were met.

He's given us everything we need, body and life, forgiveness and faith. So now ours is the pleasure to live as God's grateful people . . . to live as those who know how it's all going to turn out. We own the last chapter so we don't need to grumble about the one we're in.

Understood, we've not crossed over into the Promised Land yet; we're still in the desert of this world, still wandering through the wilderness. But God is providing his manna and it is enough. Therefore, even in the desert, there's room for gratitude and praise.

In the desert, you have to pay a little closer attention, but even here, there's so much for which to give thanks. Amen.



One of the things I love about the Old Testament is that the story of the chosen people is not an epic of national heroism nor the glorious record of a people willing to suffer hardship for the sake of freedom. Their leaders do not take on mythical qualities of strength and courage. In fact, Moses is grumbling just as much as the people God has charged him to lead. Here he's begging that God would just put him to death rather than make him lead these people and carry them around as a woman carries a nursing child. To me that sounds like a very real man who is being crushed by the stress and weight of his responsibilities. Compare that to the propaganda machine of North Korea. When Kim Jong Il, the former dictator went golfing for the first time, it's said he shot a 38 under par and had 11 holes in one, this according to the reliable testimony of 17 security guards. The Old Testament doesn't read like that. Moses is at such a low point he just wants to curl up and die.

In our text, everyone is at the door of his tent crying. “Oh that we had meat to eat! But all we ever see is this stinkin' manna.” Imagine, they grew weary even of the miraculous, and they grumbled against it. That which they knew came as a daily gift, daily bread from God, bored them. They yearned for something else, something different, something new.

Little has changed with God's people. “We never see anything but this manna!” It all starts early. Children lose interest in their own toys, and grumble about how good their friend has it with a computer full of games and a book shelf full of videos and parents who never say “eat your tomatoes” or “not until you've practiced piano.”

We never see anything but this manna! It sounds like the grumbling heard in school cafeterias across the country, all the while unmindful of a larger world full of malnourished people.

Young adults aren't immune from this dissatisfaction. It's like a teenager looking at a closet full of clothes, and complaining she has nothing to wear; like the son who detests the car he is given to drive to Watertown High School. It's so embarrassing. The “grannymobile” he calls it, but what a fuss he would make if he had to wait for the bus instead.

We never see anything but this manna! It's like college students who have grown to despise studying, having completely forgotten what a privilege and blessing college is.

We never see anything but this manna! As adults, one can think of our relationships with those we love, how at times the very presence of a dear friend will, for no apparent reason, stir up in us some annoyance or even dislike.

It's like a husband who, although he loves his wife, looks at her and sometimes regrets having pledged his whole life to her. Or he looks past his wife to another woman . . . younger, sleeker and new. Just as the Israelites of old forgot how grateful they once were for the manna, so husbands and wives can forget how grateful to God they once were for each other.

We never see anything but this manna! It's like parents yearning for the empty nest.

It's like the worker who is sick and tired of his work, and thinks of it as a curse, and doesn't have enough courage to make a change, only enough to grumble, all the while unmindful of a greater world that suffers from unemployment or underemployment. It's like a teacher or a pastor who finds fulfillment in his or her vocation, but is also convinced, "I can't do this for another twenty years." It's like a worshiper who is tired of singing the same hymns, tired of the same old liturgies, tired of the same voice in the pulpit, and returns home to have roast pastor for lunch.

We never see anything but this manna! It's like the elderly person who has been moved into a nursing home, and loathes it, despises it, thinks of it as some kind of imprisonment or punishment . . . and refuses to consider that it just might be an expression of God's love and care.

We never see anything but this manna! Similarly, you and I have experienced the same distaste for God's Word. It's our daily bread. It's all we have and all we need to be made wise for salvation. But it bores us, or offends our modern sensitivities, or confuses us. So we yearn for other food. Somehow there's time enough for the newspaper, and even for "Fifty Shades of Grey", but not enough time for God's Holy Word.

We never see anything but this manna! Just as God's people of old grew weary of the manna, you and I have probably experienced the same distaste for the Lord's

Supper. The early church called the Lord's Supper "our manna in the desert." It will sustain us through wilderness of this world until we cross into the Promised Land. Yet we grow weary of it. Failing to remember our sins, we feel no hunger for his forgiveness.

We never see anything but this manna. Grumbling is one of the things we do best, but it is contrary to who we are as the beloved people of God, the bride of Christ. When we grumble, we mar the royal and treasured position he's given us.

Grumbling is also the opposite of prayer, right? In prayer we come to God with requests and with praise and thankfulness, but when we grumble we essentially reverse prayer and rehearse all that we are not getting or all that God is not doing that we think he should be doing, a litany of grievances. When tempted to grumble, think of Jesus at Gethsemane and how he turned his pains into prayers.

Moreover, grumbling accomplishes nothing. It's a waste of time, and in fact, it makes everything a little worse for yourself and all those around you. When things are not going well, the one you don't want on the team is the grumbler. He'll poison the air, won't he? He'll drag everyone down.

Grumbling has a way of swallowing up the blessing before it arrives. If we're coveting and grumbling about something in particular, say, a big raise, when it finally comes, it won't feel like a blessing. It will feel like an entitlement. Worms will have eaten all the joy out of it.

Finally, grumbling always smacks of pessimism, which is not at all in line with the victory we have in Christ. Sometimes obeying God causes pain and suffering, but we know the victory has been won, the gift has been given, and our salvation is secure. Grumbling doesn't acknowledge any of that.

"We never see anything but this manna!" In spurning the manna, we spurn the Lord. In rejecting the gift, we reject the giver. In grumbling against the daily bread, we grumble against God. And make no mistake about it: he hears it! It grates on his ears. Vs 10 of the NIV: "the Lord became exceedingly angry." From the King James Version "The anger of the Lord was kindled greatly." From the RSV "The anger of the Lord blazed hotly." He hears it.