

AUGUST 4, 2024 SERMON

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Well, here's a big surprise, the Israelites were grumbling and complaining. Who would've ever thought that? Well, the surprising part of this, however, is that God does not bring down punishment. This is the first time that they started grumbling and complaining after they left Egypt. And of course, they're complaining about their bellies. They want to be fed. They want good food.

And they're complaining about all the good food that they used to have in Egypt and never mind that they were slaves and they had no freedom and the Egyptians worked them to death, but we had our bellies filled. So it was all good. They were very short-sighted and narrow-focused. And so they were grumbling against God. And so God promises to send them not only bread, which we often talk about, the manna from heaven, but he also sent them quail.

We don't often talk about the fact that he sent a meat so that they could eat of it, and they just dropped in their laps. Have you ever tried to hunt quail? They're very small and they're very quick. They're difficult to catch, and God just dumped them in their laps. So it was easy. And then they get outside the wilderness and they see this flat flake-like thing, fine frost. And the people of Israel saw it and they didn't know what it was. And so they said, "Manna, what is it?"

And that became its name, manna. We don't know what it is, but we're eating it. And so they had this manna, this strange thing that comes from God every day. Now, God sent it to test them, he says. He tested them because what he wants the Israelites and, for that matter, what he wants us to know is that no matter what happens on any given day, he wants us to trust him, to provide for us what we need in this daily life. The Israelites were not allowed to gather any more than one day's worth of food.

If they tried to gather more, it spoiled. If they tried to hide a little bit away and keep it for safekeeping just in case God was not going to provide for them, it spoiled. Now, on the sixth day right before the Sabbath Day, they were to gather two days worth. But those two days did not spoil because you were to trust him for two days worth. But the whole point of this exercise for the Israelites was to learn what it means to trust God in all circumstances.

Because in reality, they were not grumbling against Moses and Aaron, why did you guys bring us out? They were actually grumbling against God himself. Imagine that, going to God and saying, "God, you didn't do this right. You should have done things differently." How do you think that's going to go over? Probably not very well. The amazing thing is he doesn't always send his wrath. In fact, for us, we know he sent his son, and so we have forgiveness and peace.

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But the thing of it is we laugh at the Israelites and we chuckle when we say, "Oh, they grumbled again. Who knew?" The fact of the matter is we do the same thing. I mean, think about how many times you complain that life doesn't go right, that something doesn't work out, or that you shouldn't have to deal with this issue or that issue, or you complain about this frustrating person that you have to deal with or work with, or you get afraid or you're frustrated and you complain about things?

And I guarantee you, I mean, America's favorite pastime seems to be complaining about something. But when we think about it, we're not complaining about the situation or the person. We're really complaining to God about what he has given to us. We really are grumbling against God when we're grumbling against the situation. We're saying, "God, you don't know what you're doing. It shouldn't be this difficult for me. It should be easier. You got it wrong. Get it right, God."

We may not think that's what we're saying, but that really is exactly what we're saying whenever we grumble, whenever we complain, whenever we think life is not fair. Because God does not promise us fairness. He promises that he will give us what we need each and every day. So the question is, do we actually trust God's word to do that? Do we honestly believe that God will provide for us that he will give us the strength and whatever else we need to survive each and every day?

When we grumble, we're saying we really don't understand that or believe that as we are called to. We're saying, "God, I don't quite believe that you can handle this situation. This is really tough." But God is trying us and testing us in every situation that we might understand his faithfulness. Now, the Israelites later on after Jesus... Jesus is in the wilderness. He's fed the people with all this bread and the fish, five loaves, two fish. The people see that he hasn't gotten on a boat and yet he's gone.

And so they go out to find him and they ask, "When did you get here?" And notice Jesus doesn't bother asking their question, answering their question because they're focused on the wrong thing. They're focused on getting their bellies filled, of being satisfied for the day. They're not focused upon what is truly being given, and that is the miracle of God with them for the forgiveness of their sins.

And we know this to be true because after all that he says about they need to find this bread of life that God gave to them, they say, "Well, what sign will you give that shows that you are the one that God sent? That you are the one that will offer us salvation? What sign are you going to give?"

As if feeding 5,000 people with five loaves isn't enough of a sign, as if walking on water is not enough of a sign, as if calming the storm is not enough of a sign, as if healing all the sick and the crippled and giving them health again, if that is not enough of a sign, I'm not sure what kind of a sign they were looking for.

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But they wanted another one to prove this time. It's kind of like us. God, if you make this work out, then I will do X, Y, and Z. And then the next time, if you do it this time, and we're constantly asking God to do more and more, and then I will follow you. But the whole point of this is, again, God promises us hope and security. He promises us that he will be with us each and every day. He promises us that every day he will give us what we need. What we need.

And every day it is our job to believe in his word. That is the work that we are supposed to do. So we don't need to worry about whether we're doing enough to serve God, whether we're following him pure enough, whether we're doing the good deeds that we're supposed to be doing. The key and the core is to believe, first and foremost. Do you believe in the Son of God? Do you believe that he came to die to forgive your sins?

Do you believe that he rose from the dead on the third day and ascended on the right hand of the Father and is now advocating for you? If you believe that, that is the primary work of God. From that faith then comes all the rest of the work that we're called to do. But it flows primarily and only out of our faith. And if we don't get our faith right, our works aren't right either. So that's what Paul is talking about when he says we are called to one faith, one Lord, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

That he gave us the apostles and the prophets and the pastors and teachers and evangelists that we might know with absolute certainty his word, so that we might be united together, so that we might trust God in all circumstances, so that no matter what the problems are in this world, we do not need to be afraid of being tossed to and fro by all the false schemes and snake oil salesmen that are out there in this world. Because there's a lot of people that are telling you, "Take this pill or believe this thing and everything will be fine."

And it can be very attractive. But unless we know exactly what God's word is talking about, we could be deceived by them. So we are to walk in faith, trusting his word to guide us, trusting his word to inform us, and trusting that we're going to have trials. I mean, let's face it, we live in a wilderness just like the Israelites did. It's not easy to live here. There are frustrations. There are interpersonal problems. There are fears. There are challenges. There are calamities.

There are wars. There are famines. There's all sorts of problems in this world. And if we take our eye off of Christ and focus upon the problems, we start to grumble. We start to worry. We start to fret. We start to forget who's in charge and who has us in the palm of his hand. And so every day we are called to go back to that one baptism where we remember what God has done for us, where we remember how he has promised his bread which gives us life.

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Now, when we talk about the bread of life, that Christ is the bread of life, we often think of communion where we literally receive his body and his blood for life and salvation. But it's more than that. Jesus said that I am the bread of life. And so every time we receive the Son of God, we receive his bread, we receive his nourishment for life, which means the word of God. When we hear that word, that is the bread of life because Christ is the word of God, and that word gives us life, and that is the nourishment that we need.

So we are called to be daily in the word. And every time we hear the word, every time we hear the word preached, every time we read the word, we are receiving the bread of life. It's not just the Lord's Supper, it is the Lord's Supper, but it's also his word and his sacraments. In baptism, in the Lord's Supper, in confession, we receive the bread of life, that assurance, that confidence that even though we are a poor, miserable sinner, we are forgiven and we are saved.

And so we can stand firm because God's word has given us that foundation. God's word has nourished us and strengthened us so that we can speak in love with one another, so that we can grow in our ways to serve him, so that we can be equipped for every good work that he has given to us to do. But it stems out of that faith. It stems out of that trust. If we do not have that, we do not have anything else. So put your faith in your trust in God's Word for every detail of your daily life.

Every problem that you face is an opportunity for you to see how God is going to work. Every struggle that you have is an opportunity to see how God is going to carry you through. Every issue is an opportunity for you to see God act in your life. Trust him because he promises his peace which surpasses all understanding. He promises that he will be with you to the very end of the age, or probably more importantly for us, to the very end of our age. Because he has defeated sin, death, and the devil. They have no power over us anymore.

So when we face that day, the day of our death, we still do not need to worry or grumble or complain or be afraid. Because even that day, he has given us what we need. And that is hope and confidence that when we die, yet shall we live. And what a glorious celebration that day will be. Now, may his grace and his mercy and his peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore unto life everlasting, amen.