

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost – 2024

1 Kings 19:1-8

Ephesians 4:17—5:2

John 6:35-51

Grumble; it's such a descriptive word. Grumble is defined as "complaining about something in a bad-tempered way." Here are some choice synonyms for grumble: whine, bleat, carp, grouse. You get the idea, right? When pettiness comes streaming out of a person's mouth, when an entitled or arrogant attitude is dipped in a complaining spirit then the product is grumbling. A contemptuous sneer of the heart in verbal form – that's what was brought to Jesus' ears. St. John's vocabulary enriches this episode with OT freight. Grumbling was a word deliberately chosen. In the wilderness, as God's people made their way from Egypt to the Promised Land, they grumbled. Holy fright, did they grumble! A contemptuous sneer of the heart directed against the One who provided for them by His gracious hand, the Israelites grumbled. The Israelites groused about many things but mostly about what they had to eat and drink. They bleated against Aaron. They carped against Moses. Ultimately, Israel grumbled against God. Here's the worst of it: "Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food" (Numbers 21:5).

God had delivered them from slavery. God had made bitter waters sweet at Marah (Exodus 15:25). God gave them water from a rock at Rephidim (Exodus 17:6). God gave them bread from heaven in the morning (Exodus 16:4). God gave them quail in the evening – enough to cover the camp (Exodus 16:13). And still the people of Israel tested the Lord by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" (Exodus 17:7). It's as though every desire of the people had to be catered to or they grumbled. The Lord didn't enable this ill behavior. He disciplined them (Numbers 11:20). God understood His people. "And the Lord said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people'" (Exodus 32:9). Proud, unwilling to do what God desired, Israel was stiff-necked. A yoked animal, a beast of burden would tighten its neck muscles to resist having its head turned to go in a new direction. Stiff-necked Israel grumbled. It is akin to unbelief.

The Promised Land; a land flowing with milk and honey; the Lord was leading them to the place that He had designed for them. And unbelief raged in their hearts. "And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, 'How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumbings of the people of Israel which they grumble against me. Say to them, As I live... your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness... who have grumbled against me, not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell except Caleb and Joshua'" (Numbers 14:26-38 excerpts). That is most certainly an act of judgment. The book of Hebrews puts it plainly: "...they were unable to enter [the Promised Land] because of their unbelief" (Hebrews 3:19).

Jesus is the Son of the Living God. Jesus is the deliverer of humanity. Jesus opens heaven by His death and resurrection. Jesus is preaching the Gospel, revealing who He is by His miracles, and the kingdom of God is clearly invading this earthly realm, invading Israel. All of the OT points forward to Him, to His reign and rule, to the grace of God that will come by His blood, by His atoning sacrifice. He is healing the sick. He is curing the leprous, giving sight to the blind,

teaching the crowds with divine authority – and the people grumbled. Why? Because He said this: “I AM the bread that came down from heaven” (John 6:41). They thought that they knew this guy. “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” (John 6:42).

Grumbling; examine yourself and what will you find? Look hard enough, look sincerely enough, look diligently enough and what will you find? In your own soul, what will you find? Were those grumblers happy? Do you believe contentment is found in a grumbling disposition? What I find in myself is a complaining spirit, a distrustful heart, a hypercritical mind. I know that I am not alone. We need to repent of this grumbling. It does not glorify God nor enhance our lives in any way. We need a corrective, a divine prescription to eradicate this poverty in our soul. Look to others’ interests, not just our own (Philippians 2:4). Consider others more significant than yourselves (Philippians 2:3). Love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39). Those are all quotes from the NT. Those are all statements of the law. That’s what God expects. That’s what honors our Father. What will get us there? What will give us a trusting, obedient, grateful spirit?

Eve was in a garden and she was tempted. She had it all and she was tempted. The lie was the offer of more; you want more, don’t you Eve? Disobey God and you will have more. She reached out her hand, in a garden, and snatched at more and she brought great loss on herself. My will be done, not yours, O God. You’ve been there, in that squalid place. Now look at Jesus. He too is in a garden, the Garden of Gethsemane and what does He pray? Not my will, yours be done. Two gardens; Jesus is looking at His death and He gives Himself over entirely to His heavenly Father. That is our corrective. The Lord Christ is truly subordinate to His God and Father – Thy will be done. That’s our corrective. And He goes to Golgotha. He goes to be crucified. He goes to be the substitute for humanity as He suffers our punishment and dies our death. He alone is our corrective. His Spirit must be in me. His righteousness must be in me. His death and resurrection must be in me. That is our hope. That is most certainly God’s plan. All of that is in, with, and under these words: I am the true bread which came down from heaven so that a man may eat of this bread and not die (John 6:50).

How can a believer grumble looking at our Lord dying a wretched death to save us from judgment and hell and separation from God? How can a believer grumble when the Lord gives us His body to eat and His blood to drink as a free gift of grace, a free gift of forgiveness and life and salvation? You’ve got a ways to go in this Christian faith before you die. You all have miles to go before you sleep. What kind of a man, what kind of a woman do you intend to be? Elijah, the great Elijah, the heroic prophet Elijah crumpled under a broom tree. Jezebel seemed to be too much. Defeatist Elijah gives voice to all his apprehensions. “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers” (1 Kings 18:4). That bit is true. We are no better than our mothers and our fathers. We’re not supposed to be. But faith is to characterize us. An angel brings grace. An angel brings strength. “Arise and eat” (1 Kings 18:5). A cake and a jar of water; Elijah ate and drank. A second time with the same refrain, arise and eat; and then the lesson, the teaching, the word of power external to Elijah comes to his ears. “The journey is too great for you” (1 Kings 18:7). You are not intended to live this Christian life on your own steam. The journey is too great for you. Arise and eat. Elijah ate and

drank a second time and on the strength of that food the prophet Elijah journeyed 40 days and 40 nights to the mount of God (1 Kings 18:8).

That is most certainly you. I am the bread of life. Jesus looked unremarkable. The Son of God actively chose to look unremarkable (Philippians 2:7). You couldn't tell that He was God simply by looking at Him (Isaiah 53:2). Faith; we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). As the Israelites journeyed in the wilderness toward the Promised Land the manna kept them alive. Jesus is the true manna. He promised to give you His body to eat and His blood to drink (Matthew 26:26-28). You can't tell that it is what He says that it is by looking at it. Nondescript, weak, unimpressive – common unleavened bread and unremarkable red table wine; and yet He said “My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink” (John 6:55). “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:54). The journey is too great for us. We will arise and eat. We will repent of a grumbling spirit. We will feast on the one who is bread from heaven. We will respect our heavenly Father. We will honor His Word. We will love our neighbor.