

The Lord spoke to Moses and said. 'I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread, then you shall know that I am the Lord your God".'

Dear friends in Christ, grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The question, "What is it?" can mean more than curiosity. If someone calls us and announces the birth of their baby, our first question usually is: "What is it? A boy or a girl?", we are curious to know. If our offspring call long distance and say, "I need to talk", we say, "What is it?" as an invitation to get down to what really matters. On the other hand, when we sit a young child down and say "I need to talk to you", their "What is it?" can express a lot of things (resentment, fear, guilt).

In the biblical story of manna and quail, the Israelites look down at this food on the ground and ask, "What is it?" I think they are asking it in a way that says, "Lord, do you expect us to actually eat this stuff?" It's a grumbling question. Reading this story causes us to ask of God, "What is it?" What's the point? Lord, why would you bless these grumblers, these whiners with food in response to their moaning and groaning? We're curious. We're bewildered. We not only wonder how this food miraculously appears, we're amazed at the grace of God toward such stubborn people.

Everyone knows about 'whiners'. Often in adolescence, the whining stage rears its ugly head. A few of us never seem to get beyond it. No matter what happens to whiners, they say "Do we have to?", "We never did it that way before." or, "I liked the old way better." That's what is going on with Moses and the Israelites in the desert. The Hebrew word is translated 'murmuring'. And murmuring is something God's people have been at for a long time. It involves lying to themselves, exaggerating their former 'good life' under slavery. Those pots of meat sound so good now out in the desert...imagination makes those old days into 'good old days'. Lying to ourselves leads to murmuring against God.

As we look at God's people murmuring in the wilderness, we look into a mirror...we see ourselves and the ways that we have resisted God's leading. Recently the national press picked up a famous quote that the United States has become a nation of 'crybabies'. The talkshows have glamorized grumbling. In them we see people who refuse to take responsibility for their failures and refuse to do something about their problems. We've become a society of 'blamers'. Christians often mimic the culture we live in...We have taken

God's grace for granted, we have complained when our Holy Manna has looked or tasted different than what we wanted. Grumbling against God is a sin, the fact that it is among the oldest of sins doesn't change that fact. But God loves and cares for sinners, whether it be back in Sinai 3,000 years ago, or today. The manna in the wilderness is a testimony to God's patience and goodness. He gives bread to undeserving and complaining people.

Having said that we are like the Israelites, we are also different. We do know some things about God that they did not know....they had the prophets who reminded them of God's love for stubborn people----We have looked upon the human face of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus suffered and died for our sake and is himself the Bread of life. Still, like the disciples who walked with him, we grumble and look for the bread that does not last. The church is a testimony to God's patience, that he continues to feed and bless whiners, complainers, murmuring people who resist being led out of slavery into freedom, from darkness to light. In Jesus, we see this same patience of God as the disciples miss the point about the miracle of bread he performed. Jesus tells us, 'Work for the food that endures for eternal life', and when we ask, 'What must we do?', Jesus says, 'Believe in Him who God has sent.'

Grumbling against God is an expression of unbelief, a lack of trust and faith. Whether it be grumbling by some escaping slaves in the wilderness, by some bewildered disciples in Galilee, or by some Lutherans in Seymour, its the same sin. Our grumbling may be because we feel God owes us better than to allow a loved one to die, or some misfortune to come upon us. We may grumble because we have missed some goal that was our will and not God's. We may grumble because someone has let us down, and we hold God responsible. Our grumbling boils down to a forgetful kind of unbelief. It is born in our forgetting that God is faithful to his promises, that God has shown his love to us time and time again, that God will not forget us. We are human, so that behind every silver lining we tend to see a cloud. We forget the good things God has done and we look for misery in our present moment. We miss the wonderful and the miraculous....like the disciples and the Israelites did. We're like the friend of a hunter who mail-ordered a fully trained retriever pup. The owner took the pup out to show him off to his friend. They stopped at a roadside pond. He threw a stick across the pond, and ordered the dog to 'fetch'. Well, the dog ran across the water to the stick, picked it up and ran back across the water with it. With pride the hunter said to his friend, "Well, what do you think of my new dog?" "Huh, some bird dog--can't even swim." Like the skeptical friend, our grumbling comes from not being able to see the good that is right in front of our eyes.

The good news today is that in spite of our tendency to think first of ourselves, to complain and blame, God comes and performs miracles in our midst. He provides what we need from day to day, and calls us to receive the

gift of bread that lasts....Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life. We tend to think that it is the good people, the ones who have it all together, who come and receive the bread of life. In reality, it is sinners, grumblers, doubters who receive God's gifts of grace. We come with what faith we have and hear God's call to live, not just for ourselves, not just to fill our stomachs, but to receive eternal life. And so we come today, asking God to be patient with us but knowing God's call to live for others. This bread of life we receive calls us from that old life of doubt and grumbling to a new life of praise and faith and joy.

Come, taste and see that the Lord is good. Come and be blessed by God's presence. And the peace of God which passes all understanding keep.....