

The Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost

August 12, 2012

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Exodus 16:2-15

In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.” Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.” So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.” Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’” While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud. The LORD said to Moses, “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’” That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat.

It was said of the Italian dictator Mussolini that whatever brutal and inhumane actions characterized his rule, nevertheless, he kept the trains running on time. Isn't this just like people that as long their bellies are stuffed, their pockets are filled, and a few of their desires are satisfied they are okay with the status quo? People may even be able to put up with all sorts of evil as long as the trains are running on time. The Israelites bicker that they are ready to go back into slavery, to face once again oppression under the heavy handed Egyptians, as long as they could have all the food they wanted.

Are we ever just as foolish? Does our temporary needs cloud the big picture? Do the pleasures of here and now ever blind us from the eternal pleasures that await us in heaven? Are we perhaps at times in danger of wanting to return to slavery, of being slaves to sin, slaves to Satan as long as our bellies are stuffed, pockets are filled, and our earthly desires are satisfied? Do we ever miss out on God's promises, guidance, and care because we are more concerned about the trains running on time?

Dear Christians friends, please excuse the pun but we have before us much food for thought. The Lord wants us to recognize the source of all our blessings. The Lord

wants us to realize as our Lord Himself says ***“Man does not live on bread alone.”*** So we turn to this account and listen to the Words of our gracious Provider of all things for body and soul. As the Lord provides food for His people Israel, as the Lord gives us this day our daily bread, I pray we learn to place our trust in Him. I also pray we walk away from this lesson knowing this truth: **It is the Lord who gives us Bread from heaven.**

The Israelites have now been on their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land for about one month. This is a far cry from the forty years of wandering still ahead. They left the water at Marah and the lovely oasis at Elim and start to head into the heart of the desert, a place described as an arid wasteland. Here the food supply runs out. Even though they had only been gone about a month feeding two million people is a lot of food to pack on a road trip! So here are the Israelites out in the desert without food and without answers. ***“In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”***

Forget the fact that it was their cries to be rescued from their misery in Egypt the Lord heard and answered as He brought them out with a mighty hand. Forget the fact that the Lord miraculously saved the Israelites when they were trapped by the pursuing army at the Red Sea. Forget the fact that the Lord just recently answered their cries for water. The Israelites are hungry and start to grumble. Hunger was not their sin. Even asking for meat and bread was not sinful. They sinned because they showed their lack of faith in God. They sinned because they turned elsewhere for comfort and provision. They sinned because they grumbled against the Lord. Moses said: ***“Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”***

I do not know what it is like to be starving. I don’t think any of us have faced making a journey through a desert without food. But have we not grumbled over far less? Have we heard any grumbling yet from the children or even parents or teachers about school starting again? Has there been any grumbling about or at work lately? Have we bickered about our health or about our home or about the weather or perhaps even about the food we eat? We remember who graciously provides all these things for us, right? We too sin for when we grumble we grumble against the Lord. People who sinfully grumble against the Lord deserve to be sent to a much hotter more terrible place than an arid desert.

This is what makes what the Lord does next for sinful people so remarkable. He hears their pathetic grumbles and answers with amazing grace. ***“Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.”*** The Lord provides for the needs of His people and at the same time tests them. He gives them food just for the day. He was teaching His people to trust in Him to provide for their daily bread.

We read on in this account how the Lord graciously and miraculously provides His people with manna in the morning and quail at night. But if we just think *“wow that’s a pretty cool miracle that the Lord feeds all these people”* we would miss out on just as much as the people Jesus tells in our Gospel this morning: ***“You are looking for me, not because you saw the miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had***

your fill” (John 6). Did you catch the point the Lord wanted to get across to His people even as he supplies them with this temporal bread from heaven? ***Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’***” The Lord not only wanted them to know where their bread came from but He wanted the people to know that He was the Lord their God – God who keeps all His promises and the Lord who saves them!

The Lord wants us to know the same. This is exactly why the Lord sent manna and quail to sustain the lives of the Israelites for the next 40 years in the desert. It is because the Lord through them would send the true Bread from heaven – the one who gives us eternal life. Jesus declares: ***“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6).*** Much more miraculous than manna on the ground each morning is the fact that God became man to save us. Jesus came from heaven, took on our human flesh and blood, to live and die for grumbling sinners like you and me. Jesus came to become our righteousness and to take away our guilt and sin. Jesus came to go to a cross and take our punishment so that we can live free – free from sin – free from Satan. Jesus came from heaven to die and rise again to provide for us and sustain us with life that will never end.

The Lord gives us what we need for our bodies but in these gifts He wants us to see behind them His power and love that has also provided everything we need for our souls. In the big picture is there anything more important than this? Jesus freed us from a bondage that is far worse than slavery in Egypt. It is the Lord who gives us Jesus, the true bread from heaven. It is worth missing many meals, it is worth suffering loss, and it is worth not always having the trains run on time if it means following Jesus. Amen.