

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. The title for today’s sermon is “A bunch of whiners!”, and is based on the Old Testament reading from Exodus chapter 17. Let us pray.... Amen.

What a bunch of whiners! Those Israelites in the wilderness, whine, whine, whine. Yoy! Less than a couple of months earlier they were in Egypt, under the hand of the Egyptians, slaves dying in the service of Pharaoh, but now they are free because God Himself delivered them. Yet all they seem to do is whine, complain, and grumble against Moses and God. In today’s reading the Israelites escalate their grumbling to even threaten the life of Moses, the man God sent and worked through to deliver them.

Since crossing the Red Sea, that bunch of Israelite whiners had now complained three times, turning their faithless anger at Moses because of the challenges they faced.

It seemed every time things did not go according to the expectations of the Israelites they were quick to fight with Moses and quarrel with God by reflecting on how ‘good they had it in Egypt’. I’m sure there were times Moses wanted to scream: Really!?! You’ve got to be kidding me!!! Now, I personally don’t have all the details of the slavery practices by the Egyptians under the reign of that pharaoh, but from what Scripture records it was a nightmare. Infant boys were systematically removed from their nursing mothers and executed for no other reason than they were Hebrew; their working conditions shared close similarities to work camps in Nazi Germany as **“the people of Israel were made to work as slaves¹⁴ and the Egyptians made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work the Egyptians ruthlessly made them work as slaves.”**(Exodus 1:13-14)

The reason God sent Moses to deliver them is because, and I quote, **“the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. ²⁴ And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.... Then the LORD said to Moses, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings”**(Exodus 2:23-24, 3:7)

And God did rescue them. God delivered the nation of Israel from under the hand of pharaoh in the most dramatic demonstration of authority, dominance, and ultimate supremacy recorded in the Old Testament. God single handedly obliterated every perceived Egyptian deity, including pharaoh himself. To top it off in spectacular fashion, God annihilated the entire Egyptian army in the Red Sea. God proved He is God and brought His people out, leading them as a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22). God was with His people.

Then, no sooner did they cross through the waters of the Red Sea, and those God delivered started complaining about God. It absolutely amazes me that God did not bury them in the wilderness. After all God did for them through Moses, how could they stand there and whine at him for not doing more?

But, are you really all that much different? For that matter, am I really all that much different than that bunch of whiners in the wilderness? When everything is going well we are happy to

praise God, unless we worked for it, but as soon as something goes wrong, who are we first to blame? When things don't go your way, who do you complain about? Do you ever think God may have forgotten or abandoned you? When things go our way we allow God to be in control, but how about when they don't?

Our human sinfulness, our Old Adam, along with the devil's whispers, tempt us to ask if God really is still here watching over us or if He is able to help us when things aren't going our way. The problem in the wilderness was not that God was not there, nor was it that God was not providing for the needs of the Israelites; quite the contrary, as God provided plenty of food, water, and protection. The problem was the people did not really trust God to provide. The problem was the people did not have faith in God, in His Word, or in His Promises. The same hold true today. Do you completely trust God to provide for everything you need; even if that means that you may not get everything, or anything you want? Are you content to trust your life in God's hands, or do you need to control some of it? Do you whine, grumble, or complain at, and to, God when your life does not go as per your plan, or do you rejoice and trust that you are in His hands and He is providing for you?

Despite all the whining and complaining by the Israelites in the wilderness, God still provided for them. For Moses, instead of complaining against God, Moses turned to God and prayed. God told Moses, **“Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.”** And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.”(Exodus 17:5-6) Sure enough God guided Moses in the sight of the elders of Israel and provided, again, for the needs of the people from the Rock.

The apostle Paul uses this incident to tell of God's mercy through Christ, the Rock of our salvation. Paul writes, **“For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”** (1 Corinthians 10:1-4) God showered His grace on the people of Israel in the wilderness by means of this Rock, just as God blesses us through Christ beyond all that we sinners, and whiners, deserve. **“⁵ Nevertheless,”** Paul continues, **“with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. ... ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. ¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”**(1 Corinthians 10:5, 11-13)

What a fitting application to this Old Testament account. Paul says it all. How we all need to repent and turn again and again to the Saviour who said in today's Gospel reading, **“whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”**(John 4:14) There

are times when we are tempted to complain about how God is treating us, forgetting that eternal purpose which He has planned **for us** in Christ.

The rock which poured out in the wilderness did water the Israelites, their children, and their livestock, as Christ, the spiritual Rock, pours out all that we need for this body and life. The same Christ who fed, watered, and provided all the for all the Israelites needs during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness is the same Christ who feeds, waters, and provides everything you need for your wandering this side of heaven.

The reason we have life is because, as Paul tells is the Epistle lesson, “**we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ... ⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**”(Romans 5:1-2, 6-8)

While we were sinner—the ungodly enemies of God and dead in our sin—Christ willingly and lovingly died for you and me. He took our shame, He took our failings, and He paid the price for them all. While we were still complaining, He also took those complaints and sins of unbelief to the cross and paid for them with His life as well. Christ died to pay for all sins, including all of yours and mine. Jesus exchanged all of our unrighteousness and sinfulness for His righteousness and sinlessness. Christ overcame all sins and in Him we do stand.

Now that being said, will you have times of suffering in your life? Yes. Will you have struggles, sometimes more than you feel you can bear? Yes. Might there even be times in your life when you feel so alone, so lost or forgotten, that you might even feel as though God has abandoned you? The devil would love for you to believe it. But, BUT, there you can take the greatest comfort from God’s Word and His promises to you. As much as our society rejects any kind of suffering as good, Paul tells us how we can, “**rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.**” The reason you have hope is because God’s Word and His promises are not contingent on your feelings. Even if you do not feel anything, God’s Word still does exactly what He says it will. God’s Word and His promises are contingent on God being God, the Almighty, the Creator of Heaven and Earth.

In your Baptism this God, the Father Almighty, declared you to be His own beloved child, and that is exactly whose you became. As you passed through the waters in your baptism you died to sin and were raised to eternal life in Christ. Your baptism and inclusion in Christ is entirely based on God’s work in you on account of Christ, the Rock of your salvation.

Also, as God proclaims through the pastor at the beginning of every Divine Service, “In the mercy of Almighty God, Jesus was given to die for you, and for His sake God forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” your sins are

forgiven. Period. All of them by Christ. Even those sins which you may struggle to forgive yourself of, feelings or not. Hearing God’s forgiveness we reply with ‘Amen’, acknowledging God’s grace: our forgiveness in Christ.

Christ also pours out forth more blessing on us; His own body and blood for the forgiveness of all our sins. Again, feelings or not, God comes to you with His grace and His forgiveness. Trust in Christ’s Word’s, “take and eat this is my body, take and drink this is my blood poured out for you for the forgiveness of all your sins.” Though you deserve nothing good from God, Christ superabundantly pours out His grace on you and provides everything good in your life, starting with Himself.

As Ambrose, an early pastor in the church once said in reference to the Israelites at Massah and Meribah and to us, “*For them water flowed from the rock, for you Blood flowed from Christ; water satisfied them for a while, the Blood of Christ satiates (fills/satisfies) you for eternity You after drinking will be beyond the power of thirsting; that was in the shadow, this is in truth*” (NPNF2 10:323).

From the Rock of your salvation, God continues to pour out this living water. We have no reason to whine or complain. Instead, we can trust God and say to Christ with the Samaritan woman, “**Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty**”(John 4:15). God richly pours out His living water on you through His Word and Sacraments. Rejoice, draw near, drink up, and live in faith. In Christ, your sins are forgiven. Amen.

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