

## **Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

### **Text: Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29**

Now the rabble that was among [the children of Israel] had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, “Oh that we had meat to eat!

We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at..”

<sup>10</sup>Moses heard the people weeping throughout their clans, everyone at the door of his tent. And the anger of the LORD blazed hotly, and Moses was displeased. Moses said to the LORD, “Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,’ to the land that you swore to give their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, ‘Give us meat, that we may eat.’ I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness.”



Then the LORD said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you...”

<sup>24</sup>So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. And he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tent. Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it.

Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, “My lord Moses, stop them.” But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”

### ***Theme: What Kind of Complainer Are You?***

Throughout the Bible God’s promises us His love to His people. The first thing that He did after creating Adam and Eve was to bless them. When Noah came out of the ark, God blessed him. God blessed Abraham when He called him. When God appeared to Moses at the burning bush, He promised him, “*I will be with you.*” At Mount Sinai God made a covenant with His people that they would be His people, and He would be their God. But at times we doubt God’s love. It seems that it is no where to be found, and we begin to complain. But the Bible shows two different kinds of complaint. One is a complaint of unbelief. The other is the complaint of weakness. As we look at those two kinds of complains today, I’d like to ask, “What kind of complainer are you?”

I. Israel's complaint was unbelief because they weren't satisfied with God's blessings.

They complained about the manna God gave to them. After they crossed the Red Sea they complained that there wasn't any food in the desert. They told Aaron and Moses that they brought them to the desert to starve them to death. God answered that complaint by giving them manna and some quail. Now they had only been receiving manna for some time. The rabble among them began to crave other food. The rabble were non-Israelites who left Egypt with Israel. It says in Ex. 12:38 that a great company of other people accompanied the Israelites during the Exodus. This rabble, some of whom may have been prominent Egyptians (Ex. 9:20) began complaining, and the Israelites also started wailing. They said, *"If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost--also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna."* They began to crave things that were better than what God had given them. They even began to look at the days when they were slaves in Egypt as the good old days. They regretted that they had ever listened to Moses or followed the Lord. They were never satisfied with anything that God had given to them. They were on the verge of going into the promised land, and all they could do was complain that God hadn't done enough for them. God could have loaded them on air planes, flown them first class to the promised land, and built their homes, and something would have been wrong.

We are tempted to complain in the same way. When I was a kid, we had an uncle who always gave us a nice Christmas present. One year, he gave my brother and me a tent. I remember complaining that it had no floor. I wanted something better. We do that all the time with our family and friends. They do nice things for us, and we complain that it wasn't good enough. We crave something more.

It's worst when this complaining is with regard to God. He blesses us in so many ways, but we look at what other people have and we crave what they have. We complain that God should have blessed our lives in different and better ways.

What's wrong with such a complaint? It's pure unbelief in God's goodness and mercy for us. God had miraculously rescued Israel from their slavery in Egypt. He miraculously helped them when they were trapped at the Red Sea. He miraculously gave them manna when they needed food. He was always with them, and He always gave them the help they needed. Even more important, they were almost at the promised land. There might have been fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic in Egypt, but the people were slaves. Now they were about to enter a land that was theirs with was flowing with milk and honey, which was far better than what they left behind. But they would never be satisfied. It didn't matter how God blessed them. It would never be good enough.

God has filled our lives with blessings. He has given us His Son to pay for our sins, and He washed those sins away in Holy Baptism. He has been with us, blessed us, and delivered us from countless evils in our lives. Best of all He is leading us to paradise where we will live in His glory forever. We have been blessed, but when we crave more and complain about the gifts that God has given to us, we are turning from the Lord who has blessed us so much.

What's God's answer to such complaining? He gave Israel meat until they were sick of it, both figuratively and literally. God sent them nothing but quail for a whole month. It says in vs 20, *"[You will eat meat] for a whole month--until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it--because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have wailed before Him saying, 'Why did we ever*

*leave Egypt.*" They would eat quail until they could see it anymore. But they also became sick literally. It says in vs. 33, *"While the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of the LORD burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague."* God's anger burned against them, so that many died from the meat they wanted to have. The place where those who died were buried was called, Kibroth Hattaavah, which means, "graves of craving". Eventually God had enough of their craving for more, and His severe judgement came upon them. It is a serious sin to be blessed by God, but then to complain because we crave more. That is the complaint of unbelief.

II. Moses complaint was one of weakness because the cross He was bearing was getting very heavy.

His trouble was that God had given Him this difficult people to lead. He was beginning to feel the weight the cross that God had given Him. His cross was the stubbornness and unbelief of the people whom God had called Him to lead. He had done His best, but it seemed as if He had only failed. He was rejected by those he tried to help. His suffering made God's love seemed so far away. He was so depressed that He asked God to take his life. The biggest difference between Moses and the people of Israel is that they were turning from God as they wanted more, but Moses turned to God for help and strength.

In some ways His attitude was similar to God's. It says in vs. 10, *"The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled."* The complaint and unbelief of the people troubled him as much as it troubled God. His complaint was out of weakness, not out of unbelief. He just could bear His cross anymore.

There are also correlations to Moses' complaint today. There are parents and grandparents, who are troubled because their children or grandchildren have rejected our Lord or they are wandering from Him. We might lament the direction our society is taking today. After all the ways God has blessed our country, we hear so much complaining against His ways, and a longing for pleasures, which God forbids. This was expressed well a couple of months ago when the mayor of Chicago said that "Chick-Filet values are not Chicago values. In our society today our Christian values are being attacked as being immoral, intolerant, and unloving. The society that mocks traditional marriage and advocates abortion is telling us that our values of morality are wrong. Worst of all we lament the cravings of our sinful nature. With Paul we lament, *"The good that I would that I do not. No the evil that I would not that I do."* There are times when our struggle with temptation seems like a losing battle, when we suffer, and when our lives are filled with heartache. We are almost ready to cry out as Jesus did on the cross, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" Our crosses sometimes wear us down, so that we feel we can't take anymore.

God also has an answer to such complaints of weakness. He gives His strength and His Spirit. In Moses' case God put the Holy Spirit on 70 elders, whom He chose to help Moses lead the children of Israel. Another example is Elijah in 1 Kings 19. Elijah had to run for his life to Horeb. There he complained that his work was in vain. But God put his spirit on Elisha to lighten his burden. When we break down, God also send people to strengthen us. He assures us of His presence, His strength, and His mercy. He reminds us that He will never leave us or forsake us. God doesn't always take away our crosses, but He gives us the strength we need to bear them and assures us that He is with us. Our strength is in Him.

There are actually two messages in our text. When we complain against God because we crave more and better things than He has blessed us with, God says repent and ask for His forgiveness in Jesus. He wants us to stop running from Him as we long for better things.

When we are weary and burdened by the crosses we bear, and our hearts cry out to God in despair, He says take comfort, for He is with you. He will give you the help and the support, which you need.

May God help us all to rely on Him and His love through our Savior Jesus Christ, until we reach the promised land to which He is leading us, our eternal salvation with Him in His glory.

Amen.