

Exodus 16:2-15

August 1, 2021

God's people were hangry. That's angry with an "H" in front of it. It really is a word. It refers to irrational anger due to being hungry.

Have you ever been hangry? If so, it was only temporary because we can open the fridge or the pantry and find something to feed our hanger. God's people, trudging through the wilderness, could not. So, they become irritable, even irrational, blaming Moses and Aaron for their hungry bellies.

And their hanger causes them to grumble. They grumble so much that if you were counting before when the text was read, you heard the word grumble eight times in these fourteen verses. That's a lot of grumbling. So much so, that I don't know whether I am more shocked by their grumbling or by God's gracious response to their grumbling. Yes, gracious. He does not punish them on the spot. Rather, He responds to their hanger just like a loving mother giving food to her crying child.

And no wonder, because we call these people, after all, the "children" of Israel, and not the mature adults of Israel. And what do you do with a stomping, screaming, hangry child? Even if discipline is needed, you nonetheless give the child what it needs.

Grumbling at its core is really a cry of pain and a plea for help. But it is usually disguised as criticism, complaint, or even anger. A wise parent, therefore, will not take the criticizing, the complaining, or the anger personally, but will look through these to understand the child's distress and real need.

There is something else about grumbling. Being a plea for help, it is directed toward the one who can offer the help. A wild cat does not meow. But a tame cat does. It directs its meowing, its grumbling we could say, toward the one who feeds it. So, even though the Children of Israel sound like mournful cats with all their grumbling, they nonetheless recognize that they are being led and fed by someone else and not they themselves. They are not feral cats. They are not people who believe that they must take care of themselves, and so what's the point of grumbling because who's listening? Rather, God's people are the children of Israel who have been domesticated, tamed, and who have a place within God's house. And so they grumble because someone is listening to their grumbling.

Understanding grumbling in this way, perhaps we are forming the opinion that it is perfectly okay to grumble. God delights in our cries for help, doesn't He? It is true that it is better for us to be house cats who cry to our master for food, than to be feral cats who have no master and, therefore, make no cries at all. Yet, grumbling reveals lack of trust in the heart. The Children of Israel grumble because they believe that God is doing a poor job of leading and feeding them.

I think that is where we are. I have never heard as much grumbling in all my life as I have lately about those in political office. And my mouth, too, has done much of the grumbling I'm sorry to say. Our elected officials could say to us what Moses and Aaron said to the people: "*What are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the Lord.*"

And the same is true for church members who grumble against their spiritual leaders. And children who grumble against their parents. We think we are criticizing politicians, pastors, elders, and parents. But really, we are criticizing God. And He has every right to punish us on the spot. But instead, He looks through our sinful grumbling and He sees our pleas for help, and He gives us what we need.

To His children in the wilderness, He gives manna, bread from heaven. Not once or twice, but every day for the next forty years. And to us He does the same. He gives you the true manna, Jesus Christ, the true and living Bread from heaven. And He does this without fail.

Our son and his wife have two house cats. They have an automatic feeder set up for the same time every day. When the feeder goes off, the female cat, without fanfare, walks to the feeder to eat the food. But the male cat charges as if he is starving. And if anything is in his way, he leaps over it, around it, or both to get to the food.

Every Sunday morning at ten o'clock that automatic feeder goes off here. I'm not saying that you should charge in here like their male cat, leaping over pews and around people. Although what a witness that would be! But how wonderful to at least see you doing what their female cat does, coming in here, and up here to the Supper of the Lord, without fanfare, yet faithfully.

And why? Because you are not feral cats but house cats. You are children, God's children by virtue of your baptism. And you have a place in His house. And He never fails to feed you the true Bread from heaven. He feeds you faithfully so that, for the forty or so years of your life, He leads you to the Promised Land. And more, He never fails to forgive you for your grumbling, yes and for all your sins.

Jesus never grumbled. But He did cry out for help from the cross. Yet His Father refused to listen. He had forsaken His Son. He punished Him on the spot for all that you and I deserve.

And so, my friend, He always listens to you. He hears your cries, all of them. And even when your cries include criticism, complaint, and anger, He hears, He forgives, and He gives you what you need. Amen.