

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Lent 4

Quincy, IL

Saturday, March 13, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.

Rev. Martin Eden

Sunday, March 14, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.

“Bread from Heaven”

Numbers 21:4-9

We hear the stories about what the Israelites said and did in the wilderness. How could they say these things and grumble? They never learned. For 40 years, they continually grumbled against God and against Moses. In our Old Testament reading today, they are on their way to the Promised Land the second time after their 40 years of wandering in the desert – their punishment for grumbling and refusing to trust God and enter the land the first time. And again they cry out: “Why have you brought us out into the desert to die. We would be better off as slaves in Egypt. We have no real food. We have no water. And we loathe this worthless food.”

What was the worthless food that they loathed? It was manna: Bread from Heaven. One of the real problems for Moses was that he was leading a massive group of people who had nothing to do but to sit around and think and talk to one another.

Manna, their food, showed up on their doorstep every morning – except on the Sabbath, so God sent a double portion on Friday. All that they had to do was take two steps outside and pick it up off the ground. When they needed water, God would provide it. For 40 years, God did not allow their clothes or their sandals to wear out. God gave them everything that they needed.

The Israelites complain about not having everything that they wanted.

They certainly could have remedied their grievances with Moses and God in a much more constructive way. When water was running low, they could have come to Moses and said, “You may not be aware of this, but many of the people are running out of water. We know that the Lord has provided in the past, would you ask Him to do that for us again.”

Instead of going to Moses, the Israelites went into each other’s tents and said, “Moses doesn’t care about us. He doesn’t care if we die in this wilderness. I bet he has water. I bet he has real bread and doesn’t have to eat this manna.”

And they sit and stew about it for a while, until it they get so mad that they lash out at Moses and at God Himself.

We look at our lives and see that Satan hasn’t changed his way of doing business. You may see this same thing in the place that you work. You may see this in our community; among family, friends, even members of the church. There are those who would rather sit and stew about things than go and talk to one other.

Or instead of going to the person with whom we have the problem, there is the tendency to talk to everyone else and tell them how wrong we think that person is, or how grievously they have wronged us, and then play the passive-aggressive game and say, “Never mind; it’s fine” and then nothing really gets resolved. Therefore, Satan leads us into becoming part of the problem. And through our actions, or our lack of action, we increase the problem, make it more difficult to solve the problem, and cause a lack of forgiveness to abound.

This is why the understanding of living under the grace of Baptism is so important in the life of a Christian. You are one of God’s children now. You have been washed clean of all guilt and blame that comes with being born a sinful human being.

We look at an infant baptized child and we have no trouble understanding that he or she is completely clean in God’s eyes, and in that child’s heart, there

are not any grudges held, any malice, any contempt for anyone. One may get fussy now and then when there is hunger or the need to be changed, but we tolerate that as it is the only way of telling us what is needed. We universally accept the idea that no child holds a grudge against the person changing his diaper.

You might say, “Well, that’s easy for them. All they do is eat, sleep, and play. They get everything given to them. If I had that kind of life, I wouldn’t hold any grudges either. Wait until they have to work for a living; wait until they have adult responsibilities; it’ll change.”

The Israelites in the wilderness didn’t have to work for a living. They had everything given to them on their doorstep, and they grumbled, held grudges, were envious of others, and felt great contempt for Moses and God Himself. This was because they did not understand or appreciate God’s mercy and forgiveness.

Not only did they not appreciate food and water in the desert (it should have been a high priority to thank God for keeping them alive.) But they also did not appreciate God’s greater gift of mercy and grace. They went so far as to say that they would be better off if God would have left them as slaves in Egypt.

When we look at God’s greatest gift in our lives: God sending His Son to be our Redeemer; bringing forgiveness, life, salvation; being freed from our slavery to sin – that awful master that controlled us prior to our Baptism, we need to watch out that we don’t stumble into the same pitfalls as the Israelites, think of God’s work of mercy and forgiveness as being cheap, common, or small, and then become willing to be a slave once again – a slave to sin.

When you refuse to talk to someone who has offended you and choose to sit and stew about it instead, or when you refuse to forgive someone who has apologized for offending you in some way, then you might as well cry out with the Israelites, “and we loathe this worthless food.” Because that is the same thing

that God's detractors said in Jesus' day and throughout the history of the Christian church.

Jesus said: "I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

The bread that is "worthless" to the world today is the body of Christ. The concept of unconditional love and forgiveness is totally foreign and detestable to this sinful world. Don't give in to the ways of the world. There is no life; there is no forgiveness outside of Christ. It is not impossible for you to have a heart as empty of malice as that of an infant baptized child. In fact, it is the way of life that God has intended for you from the day you were baptized. Not that you will be perfect. That infant child is a sinner in need of forgiveness just like you and me.

But we make life very hard for ourselves and for others if we demand perfection from others (or from ourselves for that matter). Only God is perfect. The rest of us need to be forgiven, and being in Christ, you are forgiven. Even when you get a little fussy, God has been patient with you. He asks that you be patient with His other children, even when they get a little fussy. From the beginning, God has had a most excellent plan for all of you. We read it a few moments ago, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Christ died for you. Christ died for your neighbor. Rejoice that God does not remember your sin against you. Don't grumble against your neighbor, or against God when He shows mercy to your brother or sister the same as He shows to you. Pass along the grace you have been given to God's other children – even when they get a little fussy. Amen.