

Date: September 20, 2020

Scripture: Exodus 16:2-15

Title: STOP COMPLAINING, START BLESSING

Our lesson for today, from the book of Exodus begins like this: “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.” It’s somehow comforting to know, that 3,000 years ago, Moses had to deal with grumblers and complainers.

It reminds me of the story of a lady who was a veritable fount of complaints. Her pastor came by to see her one day and she began to enumerate some of her complaints: “The neighbor’s children are so noisy . . . People at the church never come to see me . . . my arthritis is getting worse . . . the weather has been so terrible . . .” On and on she went with one complaint after the other. Finally, she said, “But do you know, Pastor, I have had the worst headache all week, but suddenly while talking with you, it’s gone.”

The pastor sighed and said, “Oh, no. Your headache didn’t disappear. I have it now.” Now, pastors aren’t the only ones who have to put up with complainers. I’ve always felt sorry for football coaches. They have to put up with an amazing amount of grumbling from alumni, sportswriters, and even the average man in the street.

I like what a former football coach, Chuck Mills, once said. He defined a spectator as a person “who sits forty rows up in the stands and wonders why a 17-year-old kid can’t hit another 17-year-old kid with a football from forty yards away . . . and then, that same spectator, goes out to the parking lot and can’t find his car.” Sports fans are notorious grumblers.

Moses had to put up with a whole nation of complainers. The Bible says, the people were “murmuring.” Have you ever heard people murmuring? We all have.

The ironic thing is, that often, it’s people who have the least to complain about, who are the worst murmurers. There’s something about having much, that makes us feel we deserve more. True, the children of Israel were out in the wilderness, but at least they were free. At least, they were headed toward their own homeland, after spending centuries in slavery.

Even more importantly, consider the mighty acts of God, they had witnessed, like the parting of the Red Sea, and the Passover experience, that had finally melted Pharaoh’s hardened heart. Still they grumbled, “What has God done for us today?”

I’ve known people like that! I have been like that myself, at times. What hope is there for murmurers? Is there any cure for complaining?

First, it would help if we confessed our pettiness. Many of us simply don’t have grounds for murmuring. We have been blessed, far beyond what we deserve.

Captain Eddie Rickenbacker was a pilot in World War I and a Medal of Honor recipient. With 26 aerial victories, he was America's most successful fighter pilot. He also received the most awards for valor.

Eddie Rickenbacker was once asked, what was the biggest lesson he learned after a crash at sea, which left him drifting about, with his companions in life rafts, for 21 days? He said, “The biggest lesson I learned was, if you have all the fresh water you want to drink, and all the food you need to eat, you ought never to complain about anything.”

Many of us know that! Deep in our hearts, we’re aware of our good fortune. Intellectually, we know that there are millions of people, who would gladly trade places with us. We look at our lives, and all that we have, and we know that every day, we ought to offer a testimony of thanksgiving and praise to God. But, we still complain. Still we murmur.

This isn’t to say, things always go our way. In a *Peanuts* cartoon strip, Charlie Brown is complaining, his ball team always loses. Lucy tries to console him saying, “Remember, Charlie Brown, you learn more from your defeats, than you do from your victories.” Charlie Brown replies, “That makes me the smartest man in the world.”

I don’t know about you, but I am tired of learning from my mistakes. I want to learn from doing things right! Life is filled with frustrations, aggravations, trials and tribulations. Life has many downers. Sometimes, we need to step back, and put our lives into perspective. We need to count our many blessings.

We also need to acknowledge God’s provisions. The greatness of God, is shown, in God’s response to the people’s murmurings. Sometimes when our children seem ungrateful, we respond defensively. We’re angered by their attitude. We want them to see and appreciate all that we have done for them. Something boils within us, when they shrug off our sacrifices, as if we really should have done more. That’s a human response, to a lack of gratitude; but, it’s not God’s response.

God heard the people murmuring, and God responded graciously, as God always does. In the face of their grumbling, God provides for their needs. God provides manna from heaven. They gathered the manna each morning, and when it dried in the sun, they had a sticky solid food, which was edible and nutritious.

God also provided quail. Every spring, we are told, flocks of birds cross the Red Sea on their way to the Sinai Peninsula, where they land exhausted, near the coast, and are easily caught. This is exactly how the Bible describes God’s provision of meat, for the wilderness wandering.

God also provided water. Scholars tell us, that many porous rocks in the desert contain water. God led Moses to such a rock at Rephidim. Moses struck the rock and out poured water, adequate for the whole company.

God heard the murmuring of the people and provided for their needs. Now, God would have provided for their needs, even if they hadn’t murmured. God is a giving God. If you can’t see that, you’ll probably never change your outlook on life, you’ll never have the gratitude attitude.

I’m certain, there were cynics among the Hebrews, who sought to offer a rational explanation for the quails, the manna, the water from the rock, the cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night. But, God has placed us in a world, that must be seen through the eyes of faith.

When that great Scotsman Robert Bruce was fleeing from his enemies, he took refuge in a cave. By the time his pursuers reached his hideout, a tiny spider had spun a web over the mouth of the cave. Seeing that web, his pursuers concluded that Robert Bruce couldn't possibly be hiding there. After they left, Robert Bruce got down on his knees and thanked God for that spider.

Now, was the spider building a web in front of his hiding place a coincidence, or Divine providence? Did the spider simply happen along to build its web, or was it guided by a Divine impulse? Each of us must decide for himself or herself how we view life.

When you had that bad accident, and walked away unscathed, did you say, "Thank God!" or did you say, "Wow, I was lucky that time?"

Life is a matter of interpretation, but the person who sees the gracious hand of God at work, is in far less danger, of becoming a complainer, than is the cynic, who sees only random chance, with no plan or purpose.

A cure for complaining, will begin with a confession of our own pettiness, and an acknowledgement of God's provision. **The third ingredient in our cure for complaining, or our medicine for murmuring, is more demanding. It's that we discover God's purpose for our lives. That's the most important cure for complaining.** God's purpose for our lives is, that we are to serve others.

Dr. Karl Menninger's famous prescription to a lady who was depressed, was that she go out and find someone, who needed her, and help that person. That's also the best prescription for chronic complainers. Complainers are invariably centered on themselves, not upon God and God's goodness, not upon their neighbors and their needs, but upon themselves.

The Hebrews knew themselves to be a chosen people. The Exodus experience confirmed that. They were God's people, a holy race. What they sometimes forgot was, they were chosen for a purpose, to be a witness for God, to the nations. God brought them out of Egypt, not to live a life of privilege, but of purpose, not to be served, but to serve. We, who are the new Israel, have that same summons.

Have you ever known anyone who truly, unreservedly gave his or her life for others, who was a complainer, a grumbler, a murmurer? Are you a complainer, a grumbler, a murmurer? You and I have so much, for which to give thanks.

The children of Israel murmured, just as you and I sometimes murmur. But God provided for their needs, just as God provides for our needs. God was at work in their lives. God is at work in our lives. Isn't it time we say, "Thank you"? Isn't it time we begin sharing those blessings with others, Trusting, Believing, and having an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.