

I would love to tell you that I just can't understand the Israelites in this Old Testament lesson. The problem is that I understand them all too well. Exodus 16. The people of Israel are in the wilderness, and they're grumbling. They're grumbling because they're hungry. As they note, they're not in Egypt anymore, where they used to have lots to eat as they gathered around the loaves of bread and the pots of meat. That's what they say to Moses, though they conveniently leave out the part about the backbreaking labor and the cruelty of Pharaoh, you know, when they were slaves.

They're convinced God has brought them out of Egypt only to let them die. How does the Lord respond? He is displeased with these grumbling people—but they are still His people, and He's promised to be faithful and to bless the world through them. He tells Moses that He will send the food—meat in the evening and bread in the morning. He will provide, and this provision will also serve as a test to see how well they listen. Furthermore, as He promises this bread, the Lord is present with those people. He comes to them in His cloud of glory to relay this promise to Moses. He doesn't withdraw because of their grumbling. That night, quail land in the camp: the people eat meat. The following morning, when the dew lifts, a heavenly bread—fine as frost—is on the ground for the people to eat. “What is it?” they ask. Moses tells them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.” The Lord remains faithful. He provides what is needed to keep the people alive on the way to the Promised Land.

In our Gospel lesson this week, the people say to Jesus, “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat'” (John 6:31). He's just fed five thousand men with five loaves and two fish, but they want more proof that He's the Messiah. So Jesus tells them plainly, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). He tells them that He is someone better than Moses and something better than manna. He's the long-awaited Savior. He's come to deliver them from this wilderness. He's come to deliver them to the Promised Land of heaven. What great news! And how do the people respond?

You'll hear about it in the upcoming Gospel lessons, but you can probably guess. They grumble. They don't like the way Jesus is going about saving them. They want Him to be different. By the end of John 6, many of those following Jesus have left Him. The people fail. But the Lord doesn't. He keeps His promise, holds to His Father's will, and goes to the cross to die for the sins of the world. Their sins. Your sins. You and I are made of the same stuff as the people of Exodus 16 and John 6. While the Lord faithfully promises forgiveness to you and me, you'll be tempted to grumble about how He goes about it. The devil will tempt you in all sorts of ways.

Like the Israelites of Exodus 16, you'll be tempted to keep souvenirs from your past. But those activities of your old sinful nature were part of your slavery to sin, and you've been delivered from that. You and I will be tempted to grumble that God is taking up too much of our time when we have so many other things to do. And sometimes you'll be tempted to grumble just for the sake of grumbling. God gives a loving spouse, and we focus on faults. The Lord provides

house and home, and we focus on the amenities it doesn't have. The devil hates contentment, because contentment goes with thankfulness to God and trust in Him to provide. You'll always be tempted to grumble about what you don't have, rather than give thanks for what you do. Now add to that all kinds of media that amplify a culture of complaint. Human nature hasn't changed since Exodus 16.

Here's the good news: the Lord is still faithful. When His people grumbled against Him in Exodus 16, He didn't turn away and leave them to fend for themselves. He'd promised to deliver them to the Promised Land, and to deliver the Savior to the world through them. In His time the Savior was born. When the Savior, Jesus Christ, declared to the people in John 6 that He is the Bread of Life, many grumbled. They didn't believe. They stopped following Him and went away. But He remained faithful. He kept His promise, went to the cross and gave His life as a ransom for many. Rather than grumble about the thanklessness He received, instead He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." That's your hope and mine.

The Lord Jesus does not cast you aside for your grumbling. Instead, He warns you that your discontent is a temptation to lead you back to sin and death. Then He promises that He has died for your sin, sins of grumbling and discontent included. By His Supper, He still comes to be present to provide for you. We come to the communion rail, and look at the wafer and the wine in the cup, and like the Israelites looking at manna we might say, "What is it?" It is heavenly food. It is Jesus Himself, the Bread of Life. Eat and drink and live in His grace.