

TAKE TIME OUT - *Pastoral Retreat*

Sunday Scriptures: 20th September 2020 **Revd Janice Morgan**

Exodus 16:1-15 *Israel complains against the Lord and He responds*

¹The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. ²The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.' ⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow My instruction or not. ⁵On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days." ⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, 'In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because He has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?' ⁸And Moses said, 'When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against Him – what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord.'

⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, 'Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the Lord, for He has heard your complaining'.' ¹⁰And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. ¹¹The Lord spoke to Moses and said, ¹²"I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I Am the Lord your God'." ¹³In the evening quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, 'It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.

Moses, under the direction of God led the people out of slavery in Egypt and into the wilderness of Sin. This is an interesting name for the land they were to wander in for forty years! They were free at last but after their journey they were tired, hungry, and thirsty, which turned them to complaining bitterly against Moses for their predicament. Instead of thankfulness for all the possible blessings of freedom that God had given to them, all they could remember was the plentiful food they ate in captivity. The Israelites had conveniently forgotten the persecution suffered under the Egyptians and their pleading for deliverance! How patient God is, for here we go again, the people of God seem never to be satisfied. Yet again, as the Israelites encountered danger, shortages, and inconvenience, they complained bitterly. Why is it that when things go wrong or become difficult, humanity looks for someone or something else to blame instead of looking truthfully for the cause. They romanticised the past and remembered only what they wanted, like petulant children constantly demanding 'I want!' They longed for a false perception instead of facing reality with God given hope.

Difficult circumstances can cause stress. When that happens complaining is the natural human response. The Israelites didn't really want to be back in Egypt; they just wanted an easy life. In the pressure of the moment, they did not want to focus on the cause of their stress (in this case lack of trust in God). Instead of trusting God to provide through Moses,

the Israelites could only think about the quickest way of escaping their circumstances. When pressure comes our way, focussing on God's wisdom and power can enable us to rise above the problems of life and help us to find solutions.

Despite their complaining, as always, God still provided for the needs of His people. However, because the Israelites had not trusted God and believed in His promise to provide, He decided to test their obedience. God wanted to see if His people would obey His detailed instructions as proclaimed through Moses His chosen shepherd. We can only learn to follow by following and we can only learn obedience by obeying! Manna appeared on the ground each day as a fresh white grain the size of a pearl. A free gift containing all the sustenance they needed and in the quantities required to satisfy their physical need. The people gathered it, ground it like grain, folded it, and made it into honey-tasting tortillas. But, God only gave them enough for each day to test their trust and remind them of His grace and providence. The word manna is used by Christ in [John 6:48-49](#) to portray his own person. For us today all this continues through Christ being our daily bread; the only one able to satisfy both our physical and spiritual well-being. Obedience to the Word and will of God is still as vital as it ever was.

Still the Israelites complained, now they grumbled about not having any meat, so God provided it in the form of quails. These are very small game birds that are generally eaten whole as their bones are tiny and soft enough to chew. While this satisfied their craving for flesh it also proved to be a reprimand for their complaining. Quails graze on hemlock and toxins build up in their body, which when eaten, can cause acute liver problems in humans (see [Numbers 11:19-33](#)). In complaining against our lot, we are in fact complaining against God Himself who is our Creator and provider. We all go through wilderness periods, where our faith is tested and God seems like a far off dream. But how we respond, individually and as a Christian community, will determine the consequences we experience. God was teaching His people to learn to trust Him, both in a practical way for their physical survival and to satisfy their spiritual need through obedience in accepting the will of God. In this way their faith was strengthened and their divine relationship became more intimate.

The following portrays two different responses to life circumstances, both of whom professed belief in God through Jesus Christ. The first lady would respond to my visit by expressing anger at her situation, constantly grumbling that her legs would not work properly and complaining that not enough people came to visit her. Despite some very sound and loving advice on how she could be helped and much prayer on her behalf from several caring Christian people, she would resolutely state that God had His flaps down and couldn't hear! Stubbornly refusing all offers of help, she steadily became more depressed and bitter. The second lady responded to my visits in a very different way. This lady suffered from Parkinson's disease and being bed-ridden, had to rely totally on the care of those around her. Yet, this lady would eagerly ask me to pray for the staff and their problems, which she knew intimately. She never once complained about the obvious discomfort and limitations of her disease. Her focus was always on the care of others first and she shone with trusting faith despite her circumstances. What made the difference? The first knew of God's promises but didn't believe them, and allowed her circumstances to manipulate her faith. The second knew God's promises and trusting in His providence believed they would be fulfilled. Unlike the first lady, she was not fooled into compromising her faith.

I wonder how often we have slipped into being a 'Moaning Minnie' instead of gaining victory over circumstance by trusting God in faith? God's people display the same behaviour over

and over again throughout the history of His relationship with them. God sent the Israelites Moses who led them through danger, shortages, and inconvenience, yet they constantly criticised and complained bitterly about him, always looking back to Egypt with an unrealistic romanticised view. How did Moses cope? By trusting God and leading by faith not by sight. God will always uphold those whom He sends to lead and provide for the people's needs, in every generation. Christ is our daily bread on whom we are invited to feed. Truth cannot be argued or debated, only accepted or rejected. We have been called and God expects us to lead a life worthy of our calling. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life", are we sustained by His teaching? Do we follow the Word of God, as Christ did? Or, could we possibly be satisfying our flesh with what we crave and suffering the bitterness of reproof as a consequence? God is good, God is patient, God will provide, but He also expects obedience and repentance of sin. **Amen!**

Hymn/Song: Dear Lord and Father of Humankind *by* John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) -
Widely available

Dear Lord and Father of humankind
Forgive our foolish ways;
Reclothe us in our rightful mind;
In purer lives Thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise;
In deeper reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard
Beside the Syrian sea
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word
Rise up and follow Thee;
Rise up and follow Thee.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee
The silence of eternity,
Interpreted by love!
Interpreted by love!

With that deep hush subduing all
Our words and works that drown
The tender whisper of Thy call,
As noiseless let Thy blessing fall
As fell Thy manna down;
As fell Thy manna down.

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace,
The beauty of Thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
They coolness and Thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,

O still small voice of calm!
O still small voice of calm!

Poem: I AM the Bread ©Janice Morgan 2018-July

I AM the Bread, the Lord said,
I AM what sustains your life.
Your every breath from birth to death,
Is given you by My Spirit.

I AM the Bread, the Lord said,
Each morsel you eat gives strength.
With every chew I give to you,
An inheritance beyond belief.

I AM the Bread, the Lord said,
To swallow Me is to live.
So drink Me down, with blood to drown,
The wounds of Satan's bite.

I AM the Bread, the Lord said,
Just trust Me and follow My ways.
Then you will see, you abide in Me
And I in you always.

Prayer: Almighty God, forgive us our complaining and bring us to repentance that we might be saved. Lord Jesus Christ, help us to see others through Your eyes and follow Your example. Holy Spirit, lead us out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land. Heavenly Father, bless us with Your divine providence and make us truly thankful, whatever our circumstance. **Amen!**
