

J.j.

RESCUE IN THE DESERT

Homily for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, 2 August, A.D. 2015 ✕
St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Sacramento, CA

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15 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."

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."

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rm. 1:7)

RESCUE! - - - - Two fourteen year old boys go fishing in the ocean.

When they are late in returning, it is discovered that their boat has capsized and they are nowhere to be seen.

The Coast Guard searches--other boats search--the boys are not found as yet, and the Coast Guard has now stopped their search.

Those boys, not lost in a desert--but we we might stretch a point and call it the wilderness of the vast ocean--those boys, if still alive, desperately need rescue.

That story is a reminder that each of us needs **rescue**.

In fact, the whole of humanity, from the beginning of time until now, has constantly needed **rescue** from their/our foolish ways.

Today's OT lesson takes us back in time to a **RESCUE IN THE DESERT**, and we apply it's message to our own lives today.

Part I. We Need to be Rescued,

First of All from Complaining.

Listen to this: 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;

They had been **rescued** from slavery and harsh overseers in Egypt--they had seen a miracle of a **rescue** at the Red Sea--and yet they complain.

Well, yes I guess they were hungry and thirsty now out there in a dry and barren land. They ran out of food and water they'd been able to pack up when they set out, but were they helpless?

Had they tried everything they knew about living off the land, or did they just want something for nothing?

Something for nothing--that has a familiar ring to it. - - - - Wouldn't it be nice to get something for nothing? Like winning the lottery? Or striking it rich at a casino? We have a problem in our country--many believe that too many people are overly dependent on gov't handouts.

For example, The Heritage Foundation keeps an annual *Index of Dependence on Government*, and they find that ... an alarming trend continues in the U.S.

“More than one in five ... Americans now rely on government assistance ...” outside of Social Security and Medicare which, of course, we pay into. Florida U.S. Representative Allen West wrote, “The social safety net ... can help lift Americans out of poverty toward ... self-reliance. However, that ‘net’ should never turn into a ‘hammock.’”

I believe that too many people are in hammocks--overly dependent on government--and yet, some still complain.

Many of us, if not all of us, complain too much--we need **rescue**.

Second point: The Reason We Complain Is We Don't Trust our Rescuer.

What did the complainers say to Moses?

“... for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

Moses, **YOU** have brought us out--choosing not to remember that it was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who sent Moses--their **God was the Rescuer!**

But in spite of the miracles of the ten plagues, including the Passover of the Angel of Death at the last one, they had already given up on God.

We sometimes do that, don't we? We're like “the Buzzard, the Bat & the Bee” story.



If you put a buzzard in a pen that is 6 feet by 8 feet, and is entirely open at the top, the bird, in spite of its ability to fly, will be an absolute prisoner. The reason is that a buzzard always begins a flight from the ground with a run of 10 to 12 feet. Without space to run, as is its habit, it will not even attempt to fly, but will remain a prisoner for life in a small jail with no top.

The ordinary bat that flies around at night, a remarkably nimble creature in the air, cannot take off from a level place. If it is placed on the floor or flat ground, all it can do is shuffle about helplessly and, no doubt, painfully, until it reaches some slight elevation from which it can throw itself into the air. Then, at once, it takes off like a flash.

A bumblebee, if dropped into an open glass, will be there until it dies, unless it is taken out. It never sees the means of escape at the top, but persists in trying to find some way out through the sides near the bottom. It will seek a way where none exists, until it completely destroys itself.

In many ways, we are like the buzzard, the bat, and the bumblebee. We struggle with all our problems and frustrations, not remembering that what we must do is look up! Look up to the One who loves us and answers prayer, our Savior God. Remember, not to do so--i.e., giving up on God--is to lose our faith, and that has eternal consequences.

We Need to be Rescued First of All from Complaining, and Then from Our Lack of Trust in God, our Rescuer, Because Above All, We Need Rescue from Death!

The Good News in **Part II** is that :

We Have Been Rescued and our Rescuer Is Still With Us.

First, I Notice that an Angry God Sent Manna.

In our Psalm for today:

Ps. 78:21 Therefore, when the Lord heard, ... his anger mounted against Israel,
22 because they had no faith in God, and did not trust his saving power.

23 Yet he commanded the skies above, and opened the doors of heaven;

24 he rained down on them manna to eat, and gave them the grain of heaven.

25 Mortals ate of the bread of angels; (NRSV)

The operative word here is that little word **yet** in v. 23.

In spite of their distrust, the LORD **yet** had mercy--commentator A.F.Kirkpatrick--

“God was wroth at the unbelief of the Israelites, and **yet** he provided for their wants.” [PSALMS, Cambridge: University Press, 1951, p. 470]

I might even want to use the word ‘nevertheless’--”Nevertheless, he provided for their wants.” A RESCUE IN THE DESERT!

It is God’s great ‘nevertheless’ that sent us a Savior, the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. Jesus is that Messiah, that Christ, and in today’s Gospel he identifies himself as related to that gift of Manna--he calls himself the Bread of life:

“Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ... “I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me will never be hungry....” (Jn. 6:32, 35)

The Bread of Life! Jesus is saying that something better than manna is here, and that claim, along with his other claims to be God’s Son, led him into his own desert outside the city of Jerusalem, a desert hill known as Golgotha, the hill of the skull.

There he hung on the cross, dying for the sins of the world, for your and my sins.

The angry God who once sent manna has been propitiated by the death of his Son.

He is our RESCUE in the deserts of our lives.

Now It Is Left for Us to Trust this Bread of Heaven, Jesus our Savior.

He is **Rescue** from eternal death--he rescues us from our everyday foolishnesses.

He gives himself in bread and wine to each of us individually to assure us that we may trust him implicitly.

The God of Abraham said to Moses, “12c ... **‘in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’”**

Just so, **we** know God our Father through his Son Jesus when we are convinced by the Holy Spirit that Jesus is indeed our Bread of life.

Final point, Knowing Our Lord, Instead of Complainers We Are Proclaimers.

Hear this, ⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, ‘Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.’” ¹⁰ And 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.

Remember--from Sunday School Days--the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night that both led and followed the children of Israel into the wilderness?

Here the complainers saw the glory of God in the cloud **toward the wilderness--not back toward Egypt!**

Their faith was strengthened, and they went forward on their journey to the promised land, putting their faith into action.

Here are others putting their faith into action--true stories:

Today I witnessed a 27-year-old breast cancer patient laughing hysterically at her 2-year-old daughter's antics; I suddenly realized that I need to stop complaining about my life and start celebrating it again.

Today at 7AM, I woke up feeling ill, but decided I needed the money, so I went into work. At 3PM I got laid off. On my drive home I got a flat tire. When I went into the trunk for the spare, it was flat too. A man in a BMW pulled over, gave me a ride, we chatted, and then he offered me a job. I start tomorrow.

Today, I was traveling in Kenya and I met a refugee from Zimbabwe. He said he hadn't eaten anything in over 3 days and looked extremely skinny and unhealthy. Then my friend offered him the rest of the sandwich he was eating. The first thing the refugee said was, "We can share it."

How do we put our faith into action? We are not buzzards or bats or bees---look up---to our **Rescuer**---and fly!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

S.D.g.

The Rev. Dr. Don Schedler, Ph.D., Chaplain, Snowline Hospice, retired
[1665 spoken words] Rockwell 11, Georgia 10, Comic Sans 10.