

“Arise and Eat!”

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

Do you grumble?

The Israelites seemed to be exceptional grumblers.

The chosen people of God had just seen the ten plagues. They had just seen the armies of Pharaoh drowned in the red sea.

Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
Awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? (Ex 15:11)

You have led in Your steadfast love the people whom You have redeemed. (Ex 15:13)

The Lord will reign forever and ever.
Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously;
The horse and his rider He has thrown into the sea. (Ex 15:18)

The praises immediately ring out from the Israelites as they dance and praise God for their amazing rescue from slavery in Egypt.

And just as suddenly, the grumbling starts.

The Israelites go into the wilderness and complain about the bitter water at Marah. They complain again right away because they're in the wilderness. They actually yearn for slavery! They have selective memories and remember “meat pots and [eating] bread to the full (Ex 16:3)” in Egypt. They seemed to have forgotten all the affliction at the hands of the Egyptians! The afflictions were so bad they cried out to God for relief... and then they're rescued... and then they grumble!

As a consequence, the Israelites are doomed to wander the wilderness and are not allowed to enter the Promised Land. Their grumbling even became so bad that the Lord released fiery snakes in their midst and as many as were bitten died (Numb 21:6).

Do you grumble?

In our introit today, we heard, “You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing (Ps 145:16).” This has been recited as part of dinner prayers by Lutherans for centuries. That's easy to say when you're feasting on the finest cuisine imaginable. How easy is it when you eat the same dreary food day in and day out? That's also easy to say when things are going well,

isn't it? Work or retirement's going well. Your kids are all out of trouble and doing well. You're on a well-deserved vacation or road trip.

But how easy is it to say when your world is falling apart?

God is in control. Even when it doesn't seem like it.

When things are going well, God is in control.

When you are undergoing affliction, God is still in control.

It's a hard question, but as Job asks, "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive adversity (Job 2:10)?"

The Israelites are suffering affliction because of their stiff-necked pride and grumbling.

What about Elijah, who we heard about in the Old Testament reading today?

Elijah has faithfully proclaimed the Word of God. Even to evil prophets and rulers.

What thanks does he receive?

He's forced to flee for his life!

He too finds himself in the wilderness.

Yet God is in control. Even when it doesn't seem like it.

When things are going well for you, God is in control.

When you are undergoing affliction, God is still in control.

Again, "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive adversity (Job 2:10)?"

The Israelites received affliction because of their sin. Elijah received affliction because of his faithfulness. Both received affliction.

In the case of Job or Elijah or the Israelites in the wilderness, we know why they received affliction.

What affliction do you face?

God doesn't reveal why He rewards you with affliction.

Sometimes He is chastising you as He did the Israelites in the wilderness.

Your sin causes you to take for granted the goodness of God.

You grumble about the daily bread God provides for you.

Or you grumble about not receiving something from God that you wanted.

Repent!

God chastises you so that you will repent and be brought back to life by the forgiveness of your sins.

The Israelites grumbled and grumbled until they finally grumbled one too many times. God sent fiery serpents in the midst to afflict them. Even unto the point of physical death.

The Israelites repented and cried out to the Lord.

God doesn't leave them to die in their sin. He has mercy on His chosen people.

God instructs Moses to put the image of a snake on a pole. Everyone who looks at this image lives.

John connects the serpent on the stick with Jesus: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life (Jn 3:14-15)."

The Son of Man being lifted up means that He must be lifted up on the cross and die for our sins. This is why Jesus says in our Gospel reading today, "the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh (Jn 6:51b)."

If Jesus' flesh were merely the flesh of a man, you would be condemned in your grumbling and suffer a permanent death. But Jesus is no mere man. He is the living bread come down from heaven. He is true God and true Man. The death of Jesus on the cross covers all sin and He offers forgiveness of sins through faith. And where there is forgiveness of sins there is eternal life!

You are born grumblers. In your old Adam, you do a lot of grumbling. Grumbling brings death.

But Jesus being lifted up brings life. All your grumbling is paid for.

When you were baptized you were washed clean of all your grumbling. Like the Israelites who were bitten by the snake, you look upon the Son of God on the cross and you live!

You were also given the Holy Spirit who replaces your grumbling with praise. And He replaces your fear with hope.

Elijah suffered from fear. He had faithfully proclaimed the Word of God and he was afflicted. He ran away into the wilderness.

Just as God fed the grumbling Israelites, He fed the fearful Elijah. God fed the Israelites manna from heaven, quail, and water. He feeds Elijah with bread and water. Elijah then travels in the wilderness forty days and forty nights on this bread and water.

Dear Christian, you have reason to fear.

Satan is very much alive and seeks your downfall. It is no light thing that Peter admonishes us to, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Pt 5:8).” Satan would love to use continual grumbling or fear to be your downfall.

The world hates you. It hated Elijah. It hates you. Jesus said, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you (Jn 15:18-19).”

Your flesh continues to tempt you to sin and sin and sin. By flesh, I mean your old man who infects both your body and soul. When you hear Paul use flesh in his epistles, he is talking about your whole body. We err when we equate the flesh with sin and the soul with life. It is not the soul which brings life, but the Holy Spirit.

Dear Christian, you are chosen by God.

How do I know this?

I know you are chosen because you’re baptized and you believe as it says in Mark, “whoever is baptized and believes is saved.”

As Jesus says in our Gospel reading today, “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life (Jn 6:40).”

The will of God the Father is not to put fiery serpents in your midst so that you die. It is not His will for you to be condemned eternally. It is His will that you repent and believe the Gospel, as John the Baptist puts it (Lk 3:3).

God the Father has drawn you through the Word. Jesus is that Word. When you see Jesus lifted up on the cross, you see God’s will for you. He desires that you look upon His Son and live.

When you were baptized, you were given the Holy Spirit. Peter said it like this on Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).”

The Holy Spirit replaces your grumbling with praises and your fear with hope.

Dear Christian, you have two incredible promises in the Gospel reading today.

First, Jesus will not cast you out. Jesus says, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out (Jn 6:37).”

Whatever sin you’ve done, be it grumbling or gossip; unchastity or unfaithfulness; hate or coveting... it is all paid for by the blood of the lamb.

Repent and receive the forgiveness of sins.

Second, Jesus will raise you up on the last day. He repeats this promise three times in our reading today.

You have eternal life now and you will be raised up on the last day.

The pilgrimage you are on is like pilgrimages by the Israelites or by Elijah. You’re on a journey in the wilderness. But God gives you food for the journey.

He feeds you His very own Body and Blood for the forgiveness of your sins so that you might remain steadfast in the faith.

Dear Christian, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you (1 Kg 19:7).”

The journey is too great for you. You are beset by temptations, trials, and afflictions.

But your God knows these same things. Jesus suffered temptation, trial, and affliction as well. He knows what you are going through. He shares in your sufferings and He cares for you.

Because of this, He feeds you His very own Body and Blood so that you are strengthened in your journey.

Dear Christian, again I say, “Arise and eat.”

In Jesus Name. Amen.