

A man wanted to become a priest so he joined a monastery and took a vow of silence: he was only allowed to say two words every seven years. After the first seven years, the bishops brought him in and asked for his two words. "Cold floors," he said. They nod and send him away. Seven more years pass. They bring him back in and ask for his two words. He clears his throats and said, "Bad food." They nodded and sent him away. Seven more years pass. They brought him in for his two words. "I quit," he says. "That doesn't surprise us" the bishops said "You've done nothing but complain since you got here."

“Complaining: accusing, bellyaching, bewailing, fretting, grumbling, lamenting, moaning, murmuring, protesting, regretting, whining.....”

Grumbling and complaining— it's one of our favourite past-times. We complain about the weather, our health, money, people, the footy and the church – how much grumbling happens in churches, about churches, at morning tea after worship and in church meetings!

Our grumbling needs a target – someone to sound off at and blame for the way things are. Mum gets blamed for the meal we don't like, church leaders for the state of the church and the government for pretty well everything else! And some times God bears the brunt of our complaining too. The Israelites were hungry out in the desert. Who do they whinge to? At Moses and Aaron - their leaders of government and the church.

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." (v3)

They had it better back in Egypt? Really? Their boys were killed and all the men were in slave labour! How quickly we forget, how we glorify the past and long for the “good old days” (whatever they were) when we don't like something today. Sometimes we are tempted to live in the past and think that those good old days were better than anything that is going on now or anything that might come in the future. Grumbling falsifies the past. Grumbling also distrusts God. It denies that God is good and that God means good for us, that even in difficult and hard circumstances.

Moses and Aaron look at each other and say “don't look at us, it's the Lord you are grumbling against”. **“Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” (v7)**. Five times in this passage we are told it's the Lord they are really grumbling against, and that **“he has heard your grumbling against him” (v7)** **You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord.” (v8)** That's worth remembering next time we grumble about life. Maybe it is God who sees himself as the target of our grumbling too! God who feels we don't trust him. God who wonders why we are not approaching him in prayer. God who feels we have forgotten everything he has done for us over the years and especially in Jesus.

And what was God's response to their grumbling? Was it to rain fire and brimstone on them. Was it to teach them a lesson? No, and yes. No, God did not rain fire and brimstone. In fact he promises the opposite. He promises to rain bread from heaven on them! **“I will rain down bread from heaven for you” (v4)** God promised to continue to feed them despite their grumbling! God showed grace even to these whining complaining ungrateful people. **“At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God” (v12)**

God will show them once more how good he is. As if rescuing them through the Red Sea and saving them from slavery was not enough! God again shows his grace so they will acknowledge him and thank him. **“In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against him” (v6,7)**

It will rain bread, but God will teach them a lesson, they will have to learn to rely on him each day for what they need. **“The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them” (v4)**. Imagine the food in you pantry going off at the end of the day and you had to trust God would make sure there was something there in the morning. There would be two days worth on

Saturday night so you could rest with God and each other on the day of worship. Most mums would be happy about that one!

Sound unreal? Think again. Many people in the world today do have to trust God that they will eat tonight and tomorrow too. Tonight they will have nothing left and they will have to wait on God - or us, to send something to them. Unlike us they have to pray "Give us this day our daily bread" literally, because they would be thankful to have something for today, let alone tomorrow.

The Israelites had to learn trust in God for their daily bread the hard way. There would be no preservatives in their daily bread, you couldn't put it in the freezer, the expiry date on it was the same day. But God came good. He kept his word. The "Manna" bread was there in the morning and meat at night. Some say it might have been a natural miracle – quails flopped on the ground while migrating in that part of the world, and a certain tree produced flaky edible crystals. Who knows. However it happened God provided in an unexpected way that kept them alive. With food on the table their grumbling ceased – at least until they were sick of the taste of Manna, then the grumbling returned...

"Give us this day our daily bread..."

How well do we trust God for that – for our pension, job, food, government, peace, health, money, a roof over heads and whatever else "bread" might represent to you.

When the Israelites forgot that it was God who had rescued and saved them from slavery and danger and death, they started grumbling about their daily lives and thought he didn't care. They ignored God and complained to the nearest human beings especially their leaders to do something. Sound familiar?

As Christians when we trust God for saving us from eternal death, for forgiving our grumbling and complaining and lack of trust, when we remember and believe in Jesus who said "**I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty**" (John 6:35), then we will begin to trust him with all of life, including our daily bread. Then we will not become anxious and worried about whether we will have enough, about storing it up and hoarding things but feel free to give a good proportion of it away to those who have little or no bread, and to make sure we are generous to the work of distributing the bread of eternal life through the work of God's church.

As Christians we have two lives that need feeding and we see the world as needing two types of bread. Our physical life needs the perishable bread of this earth, bread that is earned by the sweat of our brows and the strain and stress of our everyday work at the office, at the shop, at home. It is as perishable as this week's pay and last week's loaf of bread. Our new life born of water and the Holy Spirit in baptism also needs feeding. It is fed not with perishable food, but with another kind of food, eternal heavenly food. Jesus alone gives this food. He is the "Bread of Life". Jesus said "**It is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven**". (John 6:32) That bread is himself. Bread for this life is only good for this life. We need it and depend on the Lord for it even while we work. The bread of eternal life, the bread that came down from heaven, Jesus himself, is good for eternal life.

Manna – that was the name given to the bread God sent down from heaven on the Israelites. It means "What is it". They did not recognize it. Every day God surrounds us with daily bread to bless our lives. The question is, do we recognize it? Do we see it as coming from God's hand? From heaven itself? And even more, do we recognize the daily presence of Jesus with us, our saviour, the bread of eternal life? The one who assured us that even if the pantry is bare, our health poor and there is no money in the bank, our souls are satisfied, full, and don't have to hunger or thirst for where God is in our lives. He is right there with us in it all, the one who suffered, died and rose for us.

That bread is offered to you today as it is most Sundays. "What is it?" It doesn't look like much, that's why many think little of going without it. But Holy Communion is manna from heaven, bread of life, because God says it contains the body of Christ, food for eternal life. As a child I always grumbled when there was Communion on Sundays, it took long. Now I know "what it is" and why we all need it. Now I know why we call it the "Eucharist" which means "thanksgiving". I pray that you and I will be thankful to receive this bread from heaven today.