

SERMON: Sunday – 8 August 2021 – Rev Alistair Cowper

No Complaints - Seeing God in Everything

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

John 6:35, 41-51

6:41 Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."

6:42 They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

6:43 Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves.

God warns us through Jesus of the dangers of complaining.

Now, who of us has ever complained?

Sometimes there are good reasons to complain, like when things aren't right..... for example, its not right that there should be so much inequality in the world, that there is such a big gap between rich and poor; or that babies and children die because of malnutrition.

These things are not right. And it's right to complain about them but perhaps more importantly to pray and act against them.

Acts 6:1 has a positive example of complaining when the Greeks complain that Greek widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food to the needy. And that led to the 12 disciples appointing 7 people with the specific task of overseeing this humanitarian work.

Those early workers in the church, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom we're told, were perhaps among the first social workers working for the good of society, in the building of God's kingdom on earth as in heaven.

And then there is the kind of complaining that isn't healthy, the kind Jesus is warning us against.

The Greek word used is gogguzo which according to Strong's Concordance means grumbling in the manner of "smouldering discontent" using "muffled undertones", or "droning on in a low, constant murmur". It is an onomatopoeic term imitating the sound of cooing doves.

You know the sort of thing, stage whispers often behind someone else's back but which can be so crippling to relationships and atmospheres.

The NIV has 28 occurrences of the word grumbling, most of which refer to the ancient story of the people of Israel complaining against Moses in the desert, wandering in the wilderness, on their way from captivity to the freedom of the Promised Land.

You know the sort of thing - we were better off back in Egypt, and who does this guy Moses think he is?

Jesus draws a comparison with what the Jews were saying to him to that ancient story of their ancestors. Perhaps he's saying that grumbling is not a new thing but is endemic in human nature and needs to be worked against.

Just don't do it, is his advice.

Probably because it will rob yourself and your community of something once you start.

Often our complaints are, "oh, it's just not how it used to be", implying that things were better in the past when in reality they were just different.

Do everything without grumbling or arguing is Paul's advice to the Philippians and the Corinthians.

We all know how little children or pets can often complain on long car journeys. Debie Thomas was writing about that this week about when she was a child and recounted how she used to complain bitterly at having to travel so far.

Not unlike the people of Israel facing a long journey, or the friends of the Risen Jesus having to keep going expecting him to return but journeying alone in the meantime.

Not that they were alone of course. They were learning to recognise his ever presentness in the Spirit.

But back to Debie. She wrote about what she remembered most about those long car journeys was the food her mother had lovingly prepared in advance. Food that sustained the whole family through the journey and helped get them to their destination.

And it spoke to me about how we need such food for our souls for the journey of life; food that God has prepared for us in advance - bread for life, one day at a time.

I loved reading Debie writing about the time she had just given birth to her first child. Here's what she wrote:

“I remember the huge pots of stew my parents brought to my house when I was recovering from childbirth — sore, hormonal, tired, and overwhelmed by my colicky newborn. “To build your strength back up,” my mother said each time she handed me a steaming bowl and insisted that I empty it. “Motherhood is a long journey. You need to be strong.”

I often look out of our kitchen window and see mothers, and sometimes fathers, standing on the touch line of the football pitch, waiting, attendant, giving up their own lives for the good of their wee ones playing, chasing their own dreams of olympic glory or football fame.

And this e same mothers, and sometimes fathers, hugging their children at the end, taking them home, bathing them, feeding them, getting them ready for bed, reading them bed time stories, getting up during the night when they're not feeling well, giving everything for their children, crashing on the sofa exhausted and then getting up early the next day to do the same again.

Motherhood is a long journey, fatherhood can be too. Where does the strength needed come from?

For most of us, life is a long journey and we all need to be strong for it.

And what great strength God has prepared for us and provides for us, day by day, the bread that comes down from heaven in the face of the one among us.

Let's not miss a meal by being like the complainers in the crowd, who because he was just Joseph's son, thought that Jesus couldn't be anything special.

Isn't this JUST Jesus? We know where he's from. We know his mum and dad. How can he claim to be anything special. How can he claim to be God. He's only Jesus of Nazareth.

The Jews weren't perceiving the possibility of the supernatural working through the natural.

They failed to see the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Their minds were closed to expansion.

They were only seeing what is as opposed to what could be.

They were in danger of going hungry rather than feeding on the bread of life in their midst.

Gosh. How often I'm like that in life. How often we can miss God because we've limited our thinking, our understanding, our expectation.

And then to go on and complain about it.

Complain about the ordinary. The ordinary which is sacred, filled with possibility, bursting with potential, on the verge of breakthrough, imbued with Godness.

O Lord guard us from complaint that we might not miss you, miss you in the faces we see today, in the people and creation around us, even in the hurting, the pain, the brokenness of our world.

O Lord, open us up to the possibility, the potential, the You in all things.

O Lord, may it be, let it be.

May we never miss out on the food we need for life.

Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. (6:49-50).

Let us pray,
O Lord our God,
Bread of Life and Living Water,
You have prepared all the food we could ever need,
In giving us the Bread of Life and Living Water.
In whatever we are facing today,
May we be strengthened by believing that you are who you said you are.
Keep us from grumbling.
Thank you Lord. Thank you.
In Jesus name.
Amen.