

Sermon for The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Date: September 30, 2018

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Numbers 11:4–6, 10–16, 24–29

Epistle Reading: James 5:13–20

Gospel Reading: Mark 9:38–50



Sermon Text: Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29

Sermon Title: The Whine Contagion

Introit: Psalm 135:1-3,13-14; Antiphon: Psalm 135:13

Hymns:

LSB 681 – Send, O Lord, Your Holy Spirit

LSB 768 – To God the Holy Spirit Let Us Pray

LSB 785 – We Praise You, O God (v.1,3)

LSB 663 – Rise, My Soul, to Watch and Pray

Liturgy:

Divine Service: IV, p. 203



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Text: Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29

Some foreigners among the Israelites had a strong craving for other kinds of food. Even the Israelites started crying again and said, “If only we had meat to eat! Remember all the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost and the cucumbers, watermelons, leeks, onions, and garlic we had? But now we’ve lost our appetite! Everywhere we look there’s nothing but manna!”

Moses heard people from every family crying at the entrance to their tents. The Lord became very angry, and Moses was troubled. So he asked, “Lord, why have you brought me this trouble? How have I displeased you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give birth to them? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms—as a nurse carries a baby—all the way to the land you promised their ancestors with an oath? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep crying for me to give them meat to eat. I can’t take care of all these people by myself. This is too much work for me! If this is how you’re going to treat me, why don’t you just kill me? Do not let me face my own ruin.”

The Lord answered Moses, “Bring me 70 men of Israel who you know are leaders and officers of the people. Take them to the tent of meeting, and have them stand with you.

Moses went out and told the people what the Lord said. He gathered 70 of the leaders of the people and had them stand around the tent. Then the Lord came down in the column of smoke and spoke with him. He took some of the Spirit that was on Moses and put it on the 70 leaders. When the Spirit came to rest on them, they prophesied, but they never prophesied again.

Two men, named Eldad {*EL-dad*} and Medad {*ME-dad*}, had stayed in the camp. They were on the list with the other leaders but hadn’t gone with them to the tent. The Spirit came to rest on them too, and they prophesied in the camp.

Then a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” So Joshua, son of Nun, who had been Moses’ assistant ever since he was a young man spoke up and said, “Stop them, sir!”

But Moses asked him, “Do you think you need to stand up for me? I wish all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them.”

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Some years ago there was a scare that worked its way around the globe. A scare that took many people by surprise and caused a great deal of worry, consternation and even some panic. It was the Swine Flu which peaked the interest of news worthy subjects on TV for a while.

The fear was that this new strain of Influenza would become an epidemic (a local outbreak of disease), and then a pandemic (a global outbreak of disease) and there was talk of threats describing deadly devastation not unlike the 1918 pandemic of Influenza (called the Spanish flu) which killed countless people.

There were suggestions to stay out of the pig barns at the fair, and warnings about touching the pigs. Well here we are. There was no pandemic outbreak. All the worry was for naught. That's not to say we should not take such things seriously but sometimes people do over react.

Now what does that have to do with Number chapter eleven? Well not much really. Numbers chapter eleven does not address the Swine Contagion. It deals with another outbreak of epidemic proportions. It deals with a Whine Contagion. That horrible disease of the mouth called whining.

This is not a new strain of the disease. It has in fact been around for quite sometime. Try as we might there is often a new outbreak that pops up and spreads through a community from time to time. It is the same disease that existed way back at the time of Moses, maybe as much as 4,000 years ago. Back then it first infected the rabble (the non-Jews who left Egypt with them), then the Israelites and then even Moses himself the very prophet of God.

We can see how contagious this malady is in these few verses as we watch it spread so quickly throughout the massive group of people walking in the wilderness. It had only been about a year since they had been set free from the oppression of slavery in Egypt, and the Pharaoh who was a tyrannical tyrant that brought death and suffering to so many people. It was just a year ago that The LORD God Himself showed up and freed these people by His mighty works including walking through the Red Sea on dry ground but drowning Pharaoh's army.

Now they're on their way to the Promised Land. A land flowing with milk and honey. A land in which they will be able to live under God's care and God's protection. A land in which they will be free. To get to that land they have to travel across the barren wilderness and desert that lies between Egypt and the land we now know as Israel. That area could not produce enough food and water to sustain such a vast crowd of people so God provided for them.

He brought water out of solid sun baked rocks. He brought quail in on the evening winds. He brought Manna on the morning dew. Their every need was filled by the very powerful and miraculous hand of almighty God. As is human nature however they became accustomed to such miraculous works and began to take them for granted.

We do the same thing don't we? When we come here for the Lord's Supper how often do we forget that we are coming into physical contact with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as we receive His very real body and blood with the bread and wine? How often do we forget that Baptisms are not just getting one's head wet but is in fact the point at which one's body becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit, who dwells not just with us but within us? There before our very eyes are mighty and miraculous works of God that provide access to the Promised Land called Heaven. We see these works and like the Israelites all we can say is, "That's going to make the service longer today." (*If you've ever thought that you're not alone. I remember thinking that myself on occasion.*)

The problem is we've caught the contagion. We're plagued with the petulance. We've got that dreaded Whine Flu. That's what happened back then to those folks in Numbers chapter eleven. It began with what some translations call the "rabble," the foreigners among the people. Those people who, after seeing God's mighty works, decided to go along with the Israelites to the Promised Land. They were the first to complain because they didn't have it so bad in Egypt. They had not gone through so many year of suffering. They had probably endured the ten plagues but for the most part life had been good for them.

That's where it started. It started there and then it spread. It spread like the flu throughout the people. The Israelites caught it too and started to complain:

If only we had meat to eat! Remember all the free fish we ate in Egypt and the cucumbers, watermelons, leeks, onions, and garlic we had? But now we've lost our appetite! Everywhere we look there's nothing but manna!¹

The plague is so persistent and powerful that even Moses was plagued by the pestilence. He said:

LORD, why have you brought me this trouble? How have I displeased you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Am I their mother? Did I give birth to them? Are you really asking me to carry them in my arms--as a nurse carries a baby--all the way to the land you promised their ancestors with an oath? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep crying for me to give them meat to eat. I can't take care of all these people by myself. This is too much work for me! If this is how you're going to treat me, why don't you just kill me? I can't face this trouble anymore.²

Even faithful Moses had caught the contagion, the Whine Contagion. It was quite the pandemic.

Now sometimes, if you're like me, your quick to look at those crazy Israelites and think, 'they were such complainers. They were so faithless. Why didn't they trust God more?' Every so often though it is good to look in a mirror, a mirror like God's Law. When we do we see that those crazy Israelites are not the only people who complain from time to time.

If you're like me you look into that mirror, called God's Law, and you realize that there's a little Whine Flu in us all. We're all prone to complain a little here and there. Sometimes a little more than a little. Let's all admit it sometimes the world just gets to you and then God hears all about it. Living in this sinful sin-filled world can get frustrating. We get frustrated with all those people around us and sometimes we might even get frustrated with ourselves and our constant inability to remain faithful to God in all things. We're not alone in that. Even St. Paul said:

I don't understand my own actions. I don't do what I want to do. Instead, I do what I hate. I don't do what I want to do, but I agree that God's standards are good.³

1 Numbers 11:4-6

2 Numbers 11:11-15

3 Romans 7:15-16

Now as far as the Swine Flu goes people who know about such things work on providing a shot that will protect you from the bug that infects us. You can drive down to Wal-mart® and get your shot. If all goes well you'll avoid contracting the flu and you'll have to spend the Winter finding something else to complain about.

What about this Whine Flu that we all get from time to time? Is there a shot for that? Does Wal-mart® have what I need for the fix? Well they might. I guess I haven't really looked but they might sell the fix for our frustration. It's found in a book. The title of the book is well known all over the world. They might sell Bibles at Wal-mart®.

You see the cure for this catastrophic contagion is found in Christ. It is in Christ Jesus that all our needs are provided. All that we could ever need is given to us and at no charge. God has said:

Listen! Whoever is thirsty, come to the water! Whoever has no money can come, buy, and eat! Come, buy wine and milk. You don't have to pay; its free! Why do you spend money on what cannot nourish you and your wages on what does not satisfy you? Listen carefully to me: Eat what is good, and enjoy the best foods. Open your ears, and come to me! Listen so that you may live! I will make an everlasting promise to you.⁴

The Israelites were freed from slavery to the Egyptians. God did that with His mighty works. Works that we still marvel at today. Yet those works are nothing when compared to His mighty works completed in the Babe of Bethlehem who walked a life that made Him the Christ of the cross. He is now the Savior of slaves. We who are: slaves to Satan, slaves to sin, slaves to the seductions of this world, have been set free.

We have been set free by the mighty hands of almighty God. Hands that are scared by nails. We have passed through the waters, not of the Red Sea, but of Holy Baptism. In doing so we walked into a new contract, New Testament. We have been given the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey. A land far better then any found in the area of modern day Israel. A land far better then any found in modern day America. We have a covenant with God in which He promises Heaven to us. A land without weeds, without locusts, without troubles, trial or tribulations of any kind.

This covenant, like all covenants with God, had to be sealed, signed and secured in blood. That blood flowed not from a lamb, but from The Lamb of God, God's own Son. Blood that we physically touch each time we approach this altar through His miraculous promise of forgiveness.

Now as we journey through the wilderness called, 'the world,' we are provided with pure water that cleans and bread from Heaven that heals. These Sacraments of God are here right before us like the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.⁵ They are right here in our sight to remind us that God is with us. He is the same God that was there for the Israelites. The same God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The same God of Moses. He is here. Let us pray that we not take that for granted. You are here, you have been given faith, your salvation is secure. Thanks be to God.

St. Paul writes about this in his letter to the Ephesians where he writes:

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through Christ, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing that heaven has to offer. Before the creation of the world, he chose us through Christ to be holy

4 Isaiah 55:1-3

5 Exodus 13:21

and perfect in his presence. Because of his love he had already decided to adopt us through Jesus Christ. He freely chose to do this so that so that his dear Son would be praised and given glory because of the kindness he had given us. Through the blood of his Son, we are set free from our sins. God forgives our failures because of his overflowing kindness.⁶

So when those symptoms of the sickness sink in and show themselves, stop. Stop and wonder at the miracles of God that have brought you to this place where you can know, through faith, that salvation is yours. The promise is true. Christ your Lord has saved you. With those thoughts in mind let your lips sing His praise, give thanks for all He has done, and honor God's name because He has provided us with every good thing.

Amen.

6 Ephesians 1:3-7 (adapted)