

Is the Lord among us or not? What a statement right at the end of the Exodus reading. **Is the Lord among us or not?** Arrogant demands, complaint of God's people when God doesn't meet their expectation, fill all of their wants. Of course *we would never be like the people, the Israelites in the wilderness.* Yeah right.

For God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and they grumbled. He led them across the Red Sea, destroyed Pharoah and his army, and they grumbled. He daily provided water, quail and manna, they grumbled. He gave them His very presence in the tabernacle, they saw a pillar of fire and cloud to lead, protect, guide them and they grumbled.

The Lord has created us, given us our very lives, and we grumble. He gives us our daily bread, all that we need for this body and life, and we grumble. He placed us in the richest, freest country in the history of the world, and we grumble. He gives us the opportunity to freely gather as Christians, to sing, to pray, to hear God's Word, come into His presence and be forgiven, and we grumble. We are *just* like the Israelites; but I believe we are all worse, living this side of the resurrection.

Garrison Keillor, well-known host of a long-running radio program based in a fictional Minnesota small town, Lake Wobegon. He was Lutheran, there was much Lutheran nuance, culture in the shows, lots of satire, he would say "in Lake Wobegon, where all the women are good-looking, all the men are strong, and all the children are above average." Known as the ***Lake Wobegon Effect.***

Our human tendency -overestimate ourselves, we're all above average, better than most. Who here isn't? We're more deserving than others, less to be at fault, justified in grumbling, complaints. We all think we sin far less than we actually do! So easy to be critical, so easy to complaint, so easy to grumble that other people aren't better, other people aren't more like us, that things if they were done my way it would always be better; "*oh, of course I'm not perfect, no one is, but I am better than most, know better than most, smarter than most, just ask me?*"

This is a good Lent challenge. Try to make it a day, without complaint and grumbling. I can't seem to make it out the door in the morning. We should all be ashamed, so many of our complaints, grumbling, ultimately is against the Lord. "Lord, if I had a better spouse, if I had a better home; Lord you if only gave me better people to be around, better family and friends, if you had given me better things. You should've done more for me Lord, I deserve more. It's not my fault, I'm always less to blame.

We're all like teenagers who look in the pantry full of food and frigid. That's filled, and say, "there's nothing to eat." Even the poorest among us lives better than 99% of anyone born in the history of the world. So much of our complaints, grumbling is against the Lord for not doing more, giving more, being better for us? **Is the Lord among us or not?** Repent. God help us, to be more contrite, humble, understanding, be a more compassionate people, act in grace to others.

Our Lord's parable is about the grumbling, coveting, fairness. This strikes especially in our times. Unpack all the issues: politics, economic, social and you will find coveting for things, for power, control and the cry of fairness.

But the parable foremost -teaching you of His kingdom of grace. How our Lord puts up with us in Manasseh, Meribah, and here.

For which one of us –in spite of our delusion that we've earned God's favor, and in spite of our self-righteous grumbling –deserves anything other than death and hell based on our own works? Don't you dare make any excuses. We are all sinners and we don't deserve even a denarius for a lifetime of our works.

This parable of the Kingdom, foremost grace, issues a warning against coveting, envy and self-righteousness. We see the thief crucified with our Lord just go into the Kingdom at the last moment for free. He never worked. He did not help. He receives the same forgiveness, welcome we do. He was not our friend in the world. He might have been our enemy, but now he's our brother. We are to rejoice in this is grace. We do not want to be sent on our way but want to stay in the vineyard.

Life isn't fair, but the Lord will always see to your good; foremost thanks be to God He is not fair, He does not give us what you deserve, you live by grace, bask in His forgiveness. **Is the Lord among us or not?** He most certainly is to deliver His kingdom of grace and forgiveness, just as He says, in what He has promised in this Word, this confession and absolution, this Sacrament, this forgiveness, this eternal life.

The thief on the cross and so many evil people will receive forgiveness, come in by grace. So do we all or not at all. For what He gives, cannot be earned or bought; never been deserved –not even by the greatest heroes or saints of the faith. It's certainly not earned or deserved by us. You are blessed to be here, to hear the Word, to know God's love, receive His works. His grace does not fail or disappoint. It is always and only a gift, a mercy, a blessing from God upon the likes of us, complaining, foolish grumblers and beggars. For we are not mere overpaid workers in the vineyard. He gives you the vineyard forever.