

Sermon
18/25 November 2018
West Kirk of Calder/Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald
Reading: Numbers 11:16-24;31-32
(Baptism: West Kirk of Calder)

Let me quickly put you in the picture of the Bible story we read this morning.

After many many years of slavery in Egypt, God set the Israelites free. They were travelling through the desert on their way to the Promised Land.

But they were not enjoying themselves very much! They complained about everything! They hated being slaves, but being free now all of a sudden wasn't much fun either!

They complained about the walking, the heat, the lack of water, and now, in the passage we read together, they were complaining about not having meat to eat.

Like I told the kids – when they asked God for food, he gave them manna. Almost literally bread from heaven. But that just wasn't good enough from them – they wanted meat! Talk about wanting your bread buttered on both sides!!

When they were slaves in Egypt, they had meat to eat. They were far enough away from Egypt now to start telling themselves that they were better off there. As slaves. Beaten to death if they didn't do their jobs well.

Seriously?!

They sound exactly like spoilt children! 600 000 of them! And that's only counting the men – because the women's opinions didn't count in those days any way!

What were they expecting? That God would airlift them in huge helicopters and parachute them down straight into paradise?!

Poor Moses. He was their leader. And he had his hands full with them.

My heart really goes out to him, because some days I can hardly handle my 2 wee boys – imagine having 600 000 of them, whining about everything...

“Mummy, WHY do I have to eat my veggies?! Mummy, I want ice cream!”

“Moses, we're tired. Moses, we're thirsty. Moses, we're hungry. Moses, we don't want to play this game anymore, it's boring. Moses, the food tastes yukky! Moses, are we nearly there yet?”

No wonder poor Moses almost gave up. He went to God and said: “This is too hard for me. I don't want to do this anymore.”

Now I'm sure every single parent on this earth has said that wee sentence at some point – this is too hard for me!

But the reality is, you can't stop being a parent, not even for a little while. Once you have a child, you just have to cope with parenthood. Full stop.

And to be very honest – you wouldn't ever want not to have your children. But that doesn't mean that you won't sometimes feel as if you can pull all the hair out of your head out of sheer frustration!

God didn't ignore Moses, he listened to him, and he made a plan. He said Moses, let's spread the load. Let's appoint a few elders/childminders, to help you cope with this lot.

And then God gave them what they wanted. Meat.

When God said he would give them meat, for a MONTH, Moses did a quick headcount of the cattle and figured that they might have enough meat for everybody...for a DAY!

Can you see here how that sometimes, when you are IN a situation, you can't see the bigger picture?

Because these are the same people who have miraculously been freed from slavery. These are the same people who received water from a rock and manna from heaven.

If God said he could give them meat – God could give them meat.

And did he give them meat! He sent quails. So many quails that they ate and ate and ate until they became sick of it, until some of them even died.

Be careful what you wish for...

How could they be so narrow minded, how could they crave meat so much, that they wished they were back in Egypt? They were obviously not looking at the bigger picture...

Sometimes what we have is already all we need.

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Although I find this story actually quite entertaining, I think if we read it carefully it can almost serve as a mirror for our own lives.

How much of yourself can you see in this story?

We get so much, and still we want more. We always want more. We are never satisfied with what we have. We want newer, better, smarter, more of everything.

We want more exciting lives, more money, a bigger house, a fancier car, a better job, a leaner body, perfect health... The list is endless.

I would like to challenge you all to do a wee experiment. This week, write down how many times you complain about ANYTHING, or wish for anything; and compare that with how many times you say thank you for things or feel contented with your situation.

I won't be surprised if most of us will look very similar to the 600 000 Israelites if we look at our attitude towards life on black and white.

I'm not saying we shouldn't strive to become the best people we can be. I'm not saying we shouldn't work hard at making this world a better place. All I'm saying is that maybe sometimes, we should look around us, realise what we HAVE, and stop complaining about what we DON'T have.

Because sometimes, what we have, is already all we need.

And if we take a minute to stop complaining and look at our lives from the outside, we'll realise that God is always there, taking care of us. Helping us to carry our load if it becomes too heavy for us.

The Israelites didn't know where their journey was taking them. We do. We know how their story turned out. They ended up in an amazing land of their own. The suffering was worth it.

Sometimes, when God is on the way somewhere with us, it's hard to understand why the journey can't be easier, why we can't just go back to the way things were before. But God knows where he is taking us, so let's trust him.

(..... and – God is on a journey with you and your 2 beautiful girls too. Teach them to appreciate what they have, to always see the beauty in their lives, and to never doubt that even in the times when it's hard for them to see him, God will always be with them.

We find the secret to a happy life in John 14:8:

If God is all you have, you have all you need.

Let's remember this, and go through life as people who KNOW that we are well nourished and loved, because we belong to God.

Amen