

Order of Service
Call to worship

Come with your gratitude and your questions, your weariness and your hope.
God knows our needs, and Jesus, the Bread of Life, welcomes us. Let us worship
him and receive his grace.

Our Theme Song That the world may know

Notices

Opening hymn CMP 173 Glorious things of Thee are spoken

Old Testament reading Exodus 16:1–5, 13–15, 19–30

Anthem My Peace I Give Unto You (W. Hawkins)

Offering

Hymn CMP 64 Break Thou the bread of life

Praying Together The Lord's Prayer

New Testament reading John 6:30–35

Sermon — Exodus 15

Silence for reflection

Hymn CP 275 I heard the voice of Jesus say

Benediction

Closing Prayer

Faithful God,
help us bring our needs honestly to you,
receive today's gifts with thanks,
and trust you with tomorrow.
Teach us to listen, to obey and to rest.
Jesus, Bread of Life, sustain us in your love.
Amen.

Blessing

May God provide for your needs,
Christ nourish your faith,
and the Holy Spirit give you peace,
today and in the week ahead.
Amen.

MESSAGE

[TITLE SLIDE]

Grumbling and Grace: Manna in the Wilderness

A narrative-led sermon built around three memorable images: the bitter drink, the daily basket and the unopened basket.

At 19, I was in my first year of national service and trained for bush warfare. It wasn't that bad, but one time it was hot and dry. The rivers were sand, the sun scorching, the insects infuriating, and we were walking and walking and walking. Our water bottles were empty.

We found a deserted rest camp that had a water tank. Bottles were filled. Thirsty boys glugged away. The water smelled foul, so a couple of us boiled it, added the chlorine tablets we carried, and let it cool. The others were horribly sick overnight.

The next day, we looked into the top of the water tank and found a bloated rat floating. Another time, we collected green water from a puddle and strained it through a handkerchief to remove the algae. Thirst is a big problem when you have little water.

[SLIDE — After the singing, the wilderness]

Anyway, you are camping. The kettle is ready. The cup is ready. You have your best tea in hand. You have been looking forward to that first cuppa of the day.

Then you discover the nearest water is a couple of miles away.

It would be a small inconvenience for most of us. For Israel, in the desert, it is a matter of survival.

Three days have passed since the sea. Three days since the singing. Three days since they watched God do what no one else could.

And now they are thirsty.

We might expect people who had seen such a rescue never to worry again.

But people do not work like that, do they?

We can remember God's goodness and feel overwhelmed by what is happening now.

We can believe sincerely and panic quickly.

This passage is not a story about exceptionally foolish people whom we can safely criticise. It holds us up to a mirror. And, thankfully, it opens a window onto God's grace for us to understand and embrace.

1. The bitter drink: bring your need to God

At a place called Marah, they finally find water.

Its name means "bitter": the water they found there was too bitter to drink. What promised relief became a bitter disappointment.

Their question is understandable: "What are we to drink?"

But the question quickly becomes grumbling against... Moses.

Moses, meanwhile, cries to the Lord and that is an important difference. The passage does not tell us never to speak about trouble. Moses speaks about it—to God. 'Lord God, help me. I am in a heap of trouble'.

Prayer — is not grumbling dressed up in religious language. It is bringing the real problem into the presence of the One we can trust.

"Lord, this hurts."

“Lord, I cannot see what to do.”

“Lord, I need help.”

Those are not failures of faith. No! They can be faith finding its voice.

God makes the water drinkable. Then the people move on to Elim, where springs and palm trees abound.

So this journey contains both Marah and Elim.

We should not turn that into a timetable: three days of difficulty, then a lovely time under a palm tree. God has not promised us that.

But we shouldn't mistake one bitter place for the whole story.

[SLIDE — Bring the bitter place to God.]

Are you are in a bitter place today. A time of difficulty or testing of your faith?

Do not hide it behind a cheerful phrase. Bring it to God. Let others help you carry it. Ask for practical support where it is needed.

Faith does not require us to call bitter water sweet, so never replace honesty for expediency.

It asks us to seek the Lord where we cannot yet see the answer.

1. The daily basket: receive what God gives

In chapter 16, the problem is food. And all of a sardine, Egypt starts looking attractive.

The people speak about pots of delicious meat and plenty of bread. You might think they had left a favourite holiday destination.

They had left slavery.

Fear has taken the photograph and cropped out the suffering.

We can do something similar.

An old habit, an unhealthy relationship or a dishonest way of coping can begin to look inviting when obedience becomes difficult.

“Perhaps it was easier before.” they begin to say.

But familiar isn’t always good, and difficult isn’t always wrong.

God’s response is wonderfully generous: bread from heaven.

In the evening, quail come. In the morning, something fine and pale lies on the ground.

“What is it?” the people ask.

They do not recognise the answer to their need until Moses explains it.

Sometimes God’s help comes in forms we did not expect.

Not always a changed circumstance. Sometimes a person who stays. A meal delivered. Courage to make a call. Wisdom to accept help.

Those are applications, not modern versions of miraculous manna of course, but they remind us not to overlook ordinary gifts while demanding spectacular ones.

[SLIDE — Enough for today. Trust for tomorrow]

The manna must be gathered according to God’s word.

Some people keep it overnight, even though they’ve been told not to.

By morning, it is an most unpleasant breakfast prospect.

Their extra stash has not made them safer. It has exposed their unwillingness to listen.

God is teaching them that his word is more dependable than their attempts to control the gift. Deuteronomy later explains the experience that way.

What might obedience look like for us today?

Not solving every family difficulty before bedtime.

Perhaps listening without interrupting.

Not guaranteeing the future.

Perhaps being honest about the finances.

Not feeling perfectly peaceful.

Perhaps praying despite the trembling.

Faith often looks like a small, concrete response to what God has already said.

1. The unopened basket: learn to stop

There is one more lesson.

On the sixth day, gather twice as much. On the seventh, do not gather at all.

This time, the saved manna does not rot.

God has provided for a day of rest.

Some people go out anyway.

Imagine standing there with your basket, searching the ground where God has already told you nothing will be.

We may smile. Then we notice we too can be equally guilty of knowing something God has told us in His Word, and then doing things that completely disregard what He has said. Because we want to fix it our way, instead of waiting on Go.

[SLIDE — Put down the basket. Receive the gift of rest]

Rest does not mean that responsibilities are unimportant.

It means we are limited. Finite. Human.

Some people's circumstances make rest difficult: carers, parents, shift workers, those managing pain. This passage should not become another burden laid upon them.

It should encourage us to help one another make room to breathe.

God's care includes more than keeping us productive.

And his greatest gift is more than keeping us fed.

Jesus takes up this story in John 6. "I am the bread of life," he says. Manna sustained life for a time. He gives eternal life through giving himself for the world.

[SLIDE — More than bread: Christ gives us himself.]

Christian faith begins not with an improved version of ourselves, but with receiving him.

The bitter drink tells us to bring our need.

The daily basket teaches us to listen.

The unopened basket teaches us to rest.

And Jesus invites us to come.

You do not have to arrive with your fears neatly settled or your life beautifully arranged.

Come hungry. Come honestly.

The giver of grace has not run out. Amen.