

**This Sunday's texts:**

Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29  
James 5:13-20  
Mark 9:38-50

**"Attitude and Influence**

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The Holy Gospel according to Mark, the ninth chapter:

"Teacher," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he is not one of us." "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward. If anyone causes one of these little ones - those who believe in me - to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched. Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves and be at peace with each other."

The gospel of the Lord. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, let us hear and learn from your word this day. Let it impact and guide our lives and fill us with faith and confidence in you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I went out to the car this morning to come to church at my normal time, maybe actually a few minutes earlier than I normally leave and the car would not start. This is the third time that car has not started and immediately a complaining spirit just charged up within me. Now there was a serious problem here because that complaint was aimed at me for not taking care of the problem. Normally, if I'm going to complain, I would rather complain to other people. I would rather blame them for the problem and make them fix it. But in this case, I knew that there was a problem and I had failed to take care of it. Have you ever noticed when you complain to yourself, it's kind of a mood kill? It's not a good thing.

Well, we see that spirit of complaint in our text today and also in the Bible study in Philippians 2 that I led last week and some are studying this week. There's a quote from Jim Rohn. He's an American

entrepreneur, author, and motivational speaker, guided the likes of Tony Robbins and so forth. He wrote this. "Attitude is greatly shaped by influence and association." Attitude gets shaped by the influence and association of those we are around. Now sometimes that means *they* are shaping *our* attitudes and other times, it means that *our* poor attitudes have an influence that shapes *theirs* and bring them down. Here's another way to say that. "Example, whether it be good or bad, has a powerful influence." That one is George Washington. The problem of bad influence, the problem of a lack of self-awareness when we realize that we're influencing others in a negative way and aren't aware of it.

It's a very strange thing in our passage today in the Old Testament in Numbers. Because you would not expect that by Numbers 11:4, the people would have already had a reversal. You see, in Numbers 11:1, "[n]ow the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned among them and they and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp." God pours down fire from heaven on the outskirts of the encampment and it terrifies them. So what do they do? They run to Moses. Moses, please intercede for us. Pray for us to bring an end to this. We're sorry. We shouldn't have done that. Of course, Moses intercedes and God's anger relents.

And then what happens? It says that the "rabble with them began to crave other food, and AGAIN the Israelites started wailing and said, 'if only we had meat to eat!'"<sup>1</sup> Well, this word, this term in our text, "rabble" is difficult to define. It doesn't show up in many places in the Old Testament, so there's not a lot of a comparison to figure out what it is. It could just be sort of this small group of people started to complain and it just caught on. It could mean that the people among the Israelites, who had come out of Egypt with them, but who were not Israelites, started to complain. We don't really know, but we know this. Once that complaining started, once that dissatisfaction began to seep in, the people very quickly returned to that complaining spirit and it was bad.

I just want to pause for a moment and remind you how incredible God's provision had been for them. Can you imagine? Millions of people coming out of Egypt and moving toward the Promised Land. Can you imagine how God protected them from the pharaoh's army and took care of them? He then poured down manna from heaven, said to taste like honey. But they want it the way they had it and their memories are confused. We do that. The good old days, right? Well, most of us know that the good old days weren't as good as we like to remember them to be. In the good old days, problems happened. Right? We can look back, in hindsight; we can see maybe how those problems were rectified. We can

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers 11:4

even see how those problems multiplied on each other and then maybe finally got resolved. But it's not as if the good old days didn't have their own problems. As a matter of fact, I love the fact that as they remember the fish they ate in Egypt, they said at no cost, didn't cost them anything. Of course, they were *slaves* and they weren't *paid* anything either. They worked all day every day in order to be fed so that they could go out and work the next day, but it didn't cost them anything.

Then I had another problem here as I looked at this text. You know, they've lost their appetite because they have nothing but this *manna* to eat. I was asking myself a question that I decided to call Pastor Bangsund, the professor in the Old Testament, to see if there was any insight here and there really wasn't much insight there. It's like what about all the animals? What about all the animals, this huge herd of animals that the Israelites took with them? And that they later used in sacrifice that we hear about for offerings and so forth, when they will kill the oxen or kill the sheep. We have no food to eat?

There's a complaining spirit and what I want to tell you is, as that complaining spirit churned in my heart this morning, when that car wouldn't start, I knew that Marilyn was planning to come to early service, but I knew she wasn't ready to get in the second car and go with me. Did you hear what I just said? The *second* car. So we tried to solve the problem. We thought, maybe, we could jump it. Anyway, we'll fix it when we get home. But, how will you get to church? Well, you can go to church online, but I'd really rather you were here. Oh, guess what? There's this thing called Uber, Lyft. God provides for us and in an incredible multitude of ways. But when we have this complaining spirit, often our eyes are myopic. We just kind of expect to be the way we want it to be and if it's not, we're disappointed and we're complaining. We get this negative, narrow attitude.

What I want to say to you is we see this complaining spirit throughout the Old Testament over and over again. The people complain and yet over and over again God provides abundant blessing, abundant resources. So you might say "life happens, complaining helps... not!" But you know, I had to add the word "not" because I couldn't pull up a picture on Google when I was looking for a picture about not complaining. I had to add the word "not." We are very prone in our society and in our lives to complaining. I had to remind myself many times this morning that I was about to preach on not complaining, so I better not complain, as I tripped over issue after issue this morning.

At least, the people had Moses. At least they had a good, strong leader in Moses. Did you hear how the story continued to unfold? Moses asked the Lord, "Why have *you* brought this trouble on your

servant? What have I done to displease you that you would put the burden of all these people on me?"<sup>2</sup> Moses doesn't really even complain about the people. He's saying God why did you do this to me? I shouldn't have to handle this trouble. There aren't enough volunteers to help and now I've got this big heavy load. God, what are you doing?

I guess I'm emphasizing that because I think we often go there. When we volunteer or when we engage in doing something good, somehow we have this notion that if I'm doing the right thing that I shouldn't encounter any problems. I shouldn't encounter any challenges. If I'm doing this good thing, if I'm serving the Lord, then God ought to make the roads smooth. I don't know where we got that idea. It doesn't. It's not there if you read the scripture. The examples we have over and over, Old Testament and New, is that people who serve God often encounter problems and need to seek the help of the Lord. But let me suggest that seeking the help of the Lord is not the same as complaining. Woe is me.

In Philippians 2, which is again a Bible study that many of us are involved in right now, it says this. "Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky."<sup>3</sup>

So let's understand something. Complaining doesn't do our own spirit much good. It just honestly leads us into a more negative, complaining, scarcity attitude, but there's something else about it that's problematic. Often, the people around us have that same attitude rub off on them. Yeah, why is this so hard? Maybe we shouldn't do Operation Christmas Child this year? Because no one volunteered to help you, so might as well set it aside. It's not worth the extra effort. Please don't tell me whether or not that thought occurred to you. I don't mean to be reading your mind. But we often then sort of want to just get away from it.

Moses felt that in such a strong way. He literally said to God, God if you're merciful, *kill* me.<sup>4</sup> Like there was no option of God could be merciful and help him? And then do you see what happens next in that text? God says call together seventy elders and I'm going to have them take on some of the burden of this leadership. Then to make it abundantly clear that God had really already provided everything that Moses needed, the text says that God took some of the spirit that he had put on Moses and distributed it to the seventy.<sup>5</sup> You see, Moses already had all the spirit's power that he needed to lead God's people.

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<sup>2</sup> Numbers 11:11

<sup>3</sup> Philippians 2:14-15

<sup>4</sup> Numbers 11:15

<sup>5</sup> Numbers 11:17

And so I'll take a little bit away from you and give a little bit to them, so that you don't have to do the whole job. There was enough. God's provision was enough.

Lawrence Welk, not always a philosopher I point to, said, "There are good days and there are bad days and this is one of them." Now you can interpret that to mean that this is either a good day or a bad day and what I want to suggest to you is that every day may not be good but every day has something good in it. What I want to suggest to you is good and bad days happen in parallel, literally at the same time. Good things and bad things happen every day. Where will your focus be? And if your focus is on the bad thing, is it so that it can be corrected, fixed, improved? Or is it just bringing you down? I want to suggest God is a God of abundance, that God is a God of provision, that God loves you and provides for you and therefore there is enough. We sometimes sing "your grace is enough." It's a reminder in our spirits when we find ourselves in that place of scarcity and complaint to say "Lord, I'm looking to you."

Then we have this, I think kind of scary, text in James today. "My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his ways will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins."<sup>6</sup> I say that's scary because I think we've lost it in too many ways, in too much of our relationships. We live in a time, in a period, in a culture of tolerance. In spite of the huge complaints and divisions that exist in our society, even as a church, we want to be forgiving, we want to be caring, we want to be tolerant. That's all good, but we also want to stimulate and encourage one another to love and do good works. We also want to come alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ when they're heading down the wrong road. We want to say, "Hey, I think this is a bad deal. Let's get out of this together." Let's be willing to encourage people to move from bad attitudes, spirits of complaints in, putting other people down, and being a bad influence and say, "Hey, let's work this together as the people of God. Let's see his provision."

One of my favorite verses in scripture is from 1 Corinthians 12:7. It says "to each one is given the manifestation for the common good." What that means is each one of you has received a blessing from God, so that *together* we can experience his goodness as those gifts are used together.

And then even scarier in this text is when we move to this part of Mark and it says, "if anyone of you causes one of these little ones - those who believe in me - to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea."<sup>7</sup> A couple of weeks

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<sup>6</sup> James 5:19-20

<sup>7</sup> Mark 9:42

ago, we did the installation, the blessing of our teachers, and immediately after they were installed, we read the text reminding us that they have a higher level of responsibility. You know, that if they mess up, there's more accountability. But I want to suggest to you is that's not just teachers. That's parents and grandparents. It's coworkers. It's brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to be mindful of our influence. We need to be self-aware enough to recognize that sometimes our behavior needs to be called in to check, not only for our own good, but for the good of the entire community.

Just in case you're wondering, no, I'm not complaining about Saint Timothy's. I'm not talking about some spirit of negativity that exists in the church that I, as your senior pastor, decided to use this morning to address. I'm just talking about the truth of scripture and the general realities of our life together. God desires to pour out his abundance, not only *on* us, but also *through* us, so that we can be a mutual blessing to each other, so that we can reach into this community we serve and be a blessing to them, so that we can extend his grace and good news through a shoebox across the entire world. God is good and he wants to work that good in us and through us.

It's not just that he wants to. He's doing it. It's happening. It's all around us every day. So we can look at that blessing. We can focus on that good. We can be encouraged to know that we have a God who is good and provides and whom we can serve with confidence, even in the midst of a struggle and hardship.

Yes, there are good days and there are bad days and this is one of them. And then hear this from both James and Mark today. "My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth ... someone should bring that person back" and then this word, "Have salt among yourselves and be at peace with each other."<sup>8</sup> Hardships, struggles, challenges can indeed be the way that God brings strength, preservation, and encouragement to our faith. The easy road is not the road that strengthens us. Learning how to deal with the challenges by turning to God and relying on one another, that's what builds our community. That's where our faith grows as we see God is faithful and continues over and over again to hear and answer our prayers. So we live with that anticipation and that opportunity to be a blessing to one another.

Lord, in these challenging times, help us to remember all the blessings you pour out upon us each day. Give us a spirit of contentment and an attitude of gratitude and give us the influence to be a blessing to others that they might lift their eyes to you. In Jesus' holy and blessed name. Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> James 5:19 and Mark 9:50b