

“Grumble, Grumble, Grumble” Jonah 3:10-4:11; Matthew 20:1-16; Psalm 145:1-8; 9-18-2011

Have you ever known someone, or several someones, who just seem to be perpetually grumbly? Nothing ever seems to go right even when things go right. No matter what happens, these folks simply need to grumble. Part of this is human nature, but we need to wonder a bit about those who just cannot ever see anything in a positive light.

Our Bible is full of stories of people who grumbled and mumbled their ways through life. This morning I had my choice of two different Old Testament stories to consider. I could choose either the story about the Hebrews grumbling about a lack of food in the wilderness as they followed Moses out of captivity or the story of Jonah and his efforts to escape the presence of God. I chose Jonah.

Most of us present know the story about Jonah and the great fish. We can see why he was called the “reluctant prophet” when we look at this tale.

God had asked him to go to Ninevah and proclaim God’s word to a large city that was on the wrong track. Jonah resisted and, instead ran away. He decided to hop a boat to get away from the presence of God, as if he could. But the crew tossed him overboard, at his suggestion, when they decided he was bringing bad luck to all of them. Of course, we remember, he was gobbled up by a great fish which happened to be passing by.

While in the interior of this fish for three days and three nights, he saw the light. He prayed to God and promised that he would make a sacrifice and that he would pay God what he owed. Then, at the word of God, the great fish spewed him out onto dry land.

So, Jonah went to Ninevah and told them to repent or that city's existence would come to an end. Lo and behold, the people did and God spared the city. Jonah was disappointed at this. Instead of feeling relief that so many had been saved, he felt angry and betrayed. God had been kind to non-Jews. So he withdrew from the city to grumble and sulk for a while. He made himself a shelter and God, the gracious one, caused a large bush to spring up to keep Jonah cool. Jonah liked his. But the bush withered away the next day making him angry all over again. God then asked a question designed to make Jonah pause and think. God asked how Jonah dared be concerned about a bush which he had no part in creating or growing. God had concern for a great city and the people in it—people who had heard the word of God and who had changed their ways. These people were part of God's creation. We have no idea what Jonah thought of this and what his response was if he dared to respond. .

The fairness of God was questioned in this story as it was questioned in the little parable from the Gospel of Matthew.

Those who had labored for a full day could not understand why the landowner paid them the same wage as those who had only labored for an hour or so. It seems unfair on the surface. But wages were not the point here.

God's grace was. It is extended to those who have been faithful to God since day one and to those who, in human eyes and minds are Johnny-come-latelys. It might not seem fair to us that the last will be first and the first will be last but, then, who are we to judge what is fair? We see things with human eyes and with human motivations. Often we are not fair in our assessment of the events of life and the people we encounter.

So, we grumble. We feel we have been put upon. We sense that our work is far more important than the work of those around us. We grumble that we work harder for the same acclamation and, sometimes, even pay, than those we judge put in

less hours than we do or have less talent. We are good at this, you and I.

We lose sight of the fact that all we do in life is to be done for the greatest good for the greatest number. It is not all about us. There is supposed to be reward enough in jobs well done. We are to have generosity of spirit. We are to give of our time and talent and treasure so that our left hand does not know what the right is doing. We are not to expect great praise or the big bucks. If we receive them, that is very nice in human terms. If someone else does we are to be happy for them.

When we learn to have such generosity we are doing what God hopes of us. When we don't we are acting like Jonah, reluctant to help build and be a part of God's kingdom right here in the space in which we live and move and have our being.

As always in life, we alone can choose what our attitudes will be toward one another. We need to realize that however we view life either with a lot of grumbling or a lot of joy is also the way we seem to view God. The choice of how we will be is always ours.

Amen