

John 6: 35, 41-51 (NIV)

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Knox Church

Stop Grumbling

"Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. God's people have always had this terrible habit of grumbling. Go back to the Old Testament and there you'll find them grumbling against Moses. In Exodus, chapters 15 through 17 and then again in Numbers, at least five times we read that God's people were grumbling about the leadership of Moses. They grumbled whenever they got thirsty. They grumbled when they were hungry. As they neared the promised land Moses sent men into Canaan to spy it out. They came back with stories of giants that scared the daylights out of everybody. So the people grumbled again about Moses because they were afraid those giants were going to kill them. Then a rebellion arose. Korah and a bunch of other men hatched a plot to overthrow Moses. They gathered a lot of popular support. But God, miraculously, vindicated the leadership of Moses. Korah and all his cronies were swallowed up by an earthquake. Then the children of Israel grumbled about Moses being responsible for their death. Surely the Gospel writer had these Old Testament stories in mind. Just as God's people grumbled about Moses in the Old Testament they grumbled against Jesus in the New Testament.

God's people are still grumbling today. Our churches are filled with grumblers. We grumble about it's being too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer. We grumble about how bad things are going in the world. We grumble about the church and how it's not like it use to be. I've heard there's been a few grumbles about not being able to read the summer bulletins. We grumble about our brothers and sisters in Christ. We grumble about our husbands and wives and children. We grumble about our

jobs. We grumble about people who are always grumbling.

Do you know what ministers do when we get together? We grumble. We grumble about our congregations. Sometimes, to hear us talk, you'd think that if it weren't for the *people* in our congregations we would be another Jonathan Edwards or Billy Graham. Now, if ministers do this, I know congregations do it too.

Now, let's look at why these Jews were grumbling about Jesus. There were two reasons, basically. First, they had a false and incomplete information about Jesus. They thought they knew him but they really didn't. They knew *some* things about him. But at least at one point they were misinformed. They believed that Joseph was his father, not knowing the strange and miraculous events that surrounded our Lord's conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. So part of their grumbling arose out of insufficient and false information.

That's what's behind ^{some} of our grumbling today. Someone has said that to know a person intimately is to forgive all. That is, if you were to know everything there was to know about a son or daughter, or friend or enemy, you wouldn't grumble about them. You'd forgive. You'd understand. You'd have empathy. If you knew all the influences, all the temptations, all the inborn weaknesses, all the hurts and heart-breaks of a person you would understand what it is that makes them tick. You'd understand their behavior. You'd understand why they're the way they are.

Think of the person that you grumble about; your husband, one of your children, your boss, your neighbor. If you only knew what was going on inside them, if you could only know all there was to know about them you'd stop your grumbling. And even if you couldn't excuse their behavior, you

would begin to understand and feel some empathy. You could still pray for that person. If those Jews had only known all there was to know about Jesus they'd have stopped their grumbling right there and then.

Secondly, the Jews grumbled because they simply could not understand what Jesus was saying. Just as congregations grumble if they can't understand what the preacher is saying, these Jews grumbled because they couldn't make any sense of what Jesus was saying. What he said was hard to understand.

Jesus had just claimed to be the Bread of Life. Of course he didn't mean this literally. Jesus was a man, not a loaf of bread. But, nevertheless, he was making a stupendous claim for a man. At the very least he was claiming that he could satisfy the deepest longings of the Jewish people.

But it was at this that the Jews began to grumble about him. And can we really blame them. Put yourselves in their place. They had known Jesus for years. They knew his address. They knew his family. He'd grown up among them. He'd done carpentry work for some of them. He'd grown up with some of their kids. They'd known him for years, or, at least they thought they'd known him. They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven?'"

Now I can understand their perplexity. After all, what kind of sign would it take to get you to believe in Jim Jones who led all those people down to Guyana to their deaths about ten years ago? How much evidence would it take to convert you to the Rev. Moon and his Unification Church? How much *more* evidence it would have had to take to convince orthodox

Jews that a particular palestinian Jew who had no military pretensions was the Bread of God come down from heaven to feed the starving world.

If we find it easy to believe that Jesus is the Bread of Life, it's because we are heirs of 2000 years of Christian civilization. And despite the secularism of the times, still there is a natural bent among most of us toward Christianity. It's the religion of our parents and ancestors. It's part of our heritage. But these Jews didn't have the benefit that we have. So they grumbled about Jesus because of what he said. They simply couldn't understand or believe his claim.

There are all sorts of things in the Christian faith which are hard to understand and impossible to believe apart from God's drawing us toward the truth and slowly teaching us. We finite men and women simply can't understand the eternal unless the eternal condescends to draw us close and teach us.

Think of some of the crazy things the Christian faith teaches. "If you want to save your life, you must lose it." "That's crazy", we grumble. That doesn't make sense unless God works in our hearts to reform our desires and goals in life.

Trinity
Here's another crazy thing the Christian church requires the faithful to believe. There is only one God. And Jesus is God. The Spirit is God and the Father is God. All three persons are God. And yet there's only one God. That's crazy. That's enough to make anyone grumble about the Christian faith teaching nonsense unless the Father draws us to Christ and teaches us.

The Cross
But perhaps the greatest of all paradoxes in the Christian faith is the paradox of the cross of Christ. We're asked to believe that a palestinian

Jew who lived 2000 years ago, who was executed as a criminal, was actually God in the flesh and his death on the cross in some mysterious way has saved the world from ultimate disaster. It sounds like a fairy-tale. And whenever men and women have heard that strange and wonderfully good news they've either been drawn by the Father to the Son, or they've gone away grumbling about the irrationality of the Christian faith.

But grumbling is a highly ineffective way of dealing with any problem. Grumbling never led anyone to the truth. Grumbling never has restored an erring son or daughter. Grumbling has never healed a marriage. Grumbling has never led anyone closer to Christ. Fred Buechner, a Presbyterian minister and writer, in his book, Wishful Thinking, defines Anger. "Of the seven deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back-- in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you." The same thing can be said about grumbling. It's one of the more destructive ways we express anger. Grumbling is destructive. It destroys the family. It can destroy a nation. It destroys the church. It destroys the grumbler as well. It's a sin, a deadly one. The same God who commands us not to kill or commit adultery or steal or lie or worship idols, also commands us, "Stop grumbling among yourselves."

Amen