

“What’s So Good About Feeling Bad?”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – March 12, 2023

Exodus 17:1-7

I recently came across a magazine article entitled, “**What’s so good about feeling bad?**” According to the author, pain ensures our survival. The article says studies show that people who are depressed about something are more able to assess life than those who are cheerful, and that feeling bad is also useful because guilt or fear often keeps us from doing something bad. And finally, feeling bad about not receiving a desired promotion, for example, might be exactly the push we need to reassess our life goals and to move on to something which is better for us.

All of this reminded me of an interview with Joni Earekson Tada that I heard many years ago. She was saying, “**The weaker we feel, the harder we lean on Christ. If we never were hurting, how would we ever learn to trust and obey? We would think we could make it on our own and our relationship with God would fall by the wayside.**” And those of you who know who Joni is, know that this belief did not come for her at a small price. She was a victim of a diving accident that left her paralyzed. She lives in a wheelchair and proclaims the love of Jesus Christ in every way she can, even by painting with a paint brush held in her teeth.

So often, as I am working on a sermon, the most perfect examples surface during the week; but even scarier than that, so often what the humans in the Scripture that week are doing, so also am I. How often have we dealt with so much during the week that we felt like complaining.

This all leads us into our Scripture lesson from Exodus: You know, that one all about the complaining Israelites! “What more could they possibly want?” we might wonder. God has been so physically active in their lives. Surely, they ought to know that God is still with them. The Israelites have **survived the many plagues** that God sent to the Egyptians to cause the Pharaoh to let them go. They were right there to experience the **parting of the Red Sea** by God that let them walk through on dry land. God had sent a **cloud which led them each day and a pillar of fire by night**; and they had **Moses as their leader**. And yet they complained!

Oh, this was not the first time, though. Just a little earlier **God had to send Manna** because they complained of having nothing to eat. Then they complained about not having meat, so **God sent them quail**. And in our reading for today they are complaining and **murmuring for water**. One more time, God proves to them that he is still with them, caring for them and providing for their every need.

Of course, we are not likely to do that are we? Perhaps we are. Let's look at what we complain about.

Do you remember a time when you moved, like the Israelites? Maybe not as far, or as often, but most of us have moved at least once in our lives. We have been ever so grateful that we have everything all moved in, God has provided a home, and friends have been wonderful — and for just a little bit, we feel like we have it made. Then comes day after day of not being able to find what we are looking for, and we fuss and carry on, thinking a box must have been left behind, or some dummy carried it to the basement instead of the kitchen — well you know how it goes!

God provides us with a beautiful, sunny day, no wind and it is as clear as can be, and we still complain, “but it's so cold.” Or **we complain about needing rain** and God sends the rain and are we happy and celebrate the rain? Maybe on the first day, but what happens on the third or fourth day of rain? We start off again, “Why doesn't the sun ever shine anymore? I can't stand this gloomy stuff.” Need I say more?

Our hearts keep on beating, our lives go on, our needs are provided for, and yet we complain about getting old, never mind where we would be if we didn't!

Complaining! It truly is a part of who we are as humans. But is feeling “bad” good for us?

Soon the robins will be back, and they will once again teach us a lesson that we so soon forget. We watch them as they peck the ground seeking worms, and they sometimes look despairingly down into a dead hole. And the robin decides to give up. There is nothing there. In fact, if he could talk, by now he would be complaining. But then it's like he suddenly has a second thought, and he pokes idly back into that hole. Suddenly the anticipation rises and before we can say “poor robin,” he flies away with a juicy worm...

The threshold of our religion is at the point that the hungry soul, the hurting soul, the complaining soul, stands squarely in front of the barren, hopeless situation, and realizes that our strength can only come from God. **“The weaker we feel, the harder we lean on Christ. If we never were hurting, how would we ever learn to trust and obey?”**

How often do we demand proof from God in an instant, believing that God is supposed to show up like a genie in a bottle and make all things perfect with a “Poof?” Why is it that somehow, we think that God should make everything easy for us? That there is no price to pay for our personal spiritual healing? Do you suppose the Israelites really believed that they could travel all the way from Egypt to Canaan without any difficulties? Do we think that we should be able to travel daily, down life’s road, without any struggle or pain?

Likewise, why is it that we tend to think that suffering means the absence of God? It surely was not in those first few hours on Good Friday. It was then that Christ chose to die for us without murmuring. That is why Christ is the Rock of our salvation. “O Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee. Let the water and the blood, from thy wounded side which flowed, be of sin the double cure; save from wrath and make me pure!” Amen.