Ordinary 25 Year A Matthew 20:1-16, **Exodus 16:2-16,** Phil 1:21-30 **Scott MALCOLM**

It hit me like a cold wet fish smacked up the side of my head. The complaining. My mate Rodger Scoones stood in the middle of the kitchen floor and said, “it was so cold last night, I had to turn the heater on.” My other mate Roger White said, “Sleeping in a big double bed on your own is no fun.”

My other mate Dave Smith and I looked flabbergasted at one another. Here we were sharing a double bed, with no heater mind you, so our older and more senior colleagues could have their own rooms and double beds while we were on retreat, and all they could do was complain. Murmur. Sow discord and dissension.

I felt like Moses and Aaron from Exodus 16 in our reading this morning.

Here the Lord God has led the people out of Egypt, a place of bondage and subjection, a place of slavery and servitude, a place where the children of the people of Israel, were put to death on a regular basis and all they can do is complain.

“You have led us out into the wilderness to starve us to death,” they cry. No thank you for rescuing us, no thank you for the life we have been given by your getting us out, no thank you for deliverance from slavery, servitude and subjection … simply complaining.

Just like my two mates. No thank you for a room of their own and a heater, no thank you for putting up with another snoring, belching, smelling body in the bed along side you … No. Just complaining.

You see there is always a lot more going on when we complain, when we murmur. Here in Exodus, it is the denial of the love of God, the choice by God of the people of Israel for deliverance in the first place, the loving kindness of God in setting them free. Instead there is only accusation, “you have led us out here to kill us.”

For my mates it was simply an observation about being away from home, missing their lovely wives lying warmingly beside them, and it was cold. But there was a distinct lack of appreciation for the sacrifice of Dave and I in having to share a bed together, because warmed by Brother Smith or not, it certainly wasn’t any better than what they had, and I’m sure he would likewise agree.

In Exodus it is a denial of the love of God, the love that called Jacob Israel. That called Moses to led, Aaron to preach, that called Israel in to being. The love that would lead to the ultimate manna from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Matthews story of the Labourers, the murmuring is a denial of the goodness of God. That God can’t be good to all but must measure out God’s goodness in terms of human fairness, not just be good to everybody as God chooses.

Murmuring is a constant in the wilderness wanderings of the book of Exodus. The motif of murmuring continually reminds whoever reads it or hears it, from whatever time or place, country or station in life, that being called by God is not enough. Being delivered by God is not enough. Being led from slavery and subjection is not enough. Even if it is from the horrors of murdered children, it is not enough, because the murmuring in Exodus reminds us that we are not just called from something, from slavery, death, servitude and subjection, but to something.

We are called to a life lived in deliverance, lived in freedom, lived in openness and thankfulness, gratitude and humility. We are called to the love and goodness of God which on all this, is based. This love and goodness lead to the ultimate manna from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. As Paul says directly to us, “Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” We called to, not just out of.

My mates weren’t the only ones to murmur while on retreat. I did my fair share of complaining. Apart from my bed mates snoring and being slow off the mark for exercise in the morning, the fact that I had to do the dishes and clean the place up all the time, that every time I wanted a cup of tea I had to make 6 instead of one, meant there was plenty of murmuring from me as well.

But as I thought about these readings and the things I have written; I began to realise that I have been called from murmuring too. Instead of murmuring about snoring, cleaning up, making the tea and doing the dishes, I should have realised that I have been called to being grateful for five mates to go retreat with. Five mates whose lives I have shared for the past 33 years. Five mates who stand with me like a shield wall, in all that has come my way and all that will come. Five mates who like you, have all been called and delivered, who like you have been set free from slavery and subjection, five mates who like you have been called by God out of Egypt and into lives of freedom and gratitude, thankfulness and openness. Five mates who like you have feasted on the real manna from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Five mates who like you, seek to “live their lives in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

I just wish the two in the double beds and solo rooms, were a bit more grateful too.

Thanks be to God.