

Numbers 11:4-6

Dear Friends in Christ,

I'm going to put several quotes from Touchstone journal in front of you. I have quoted from this publication in the past. It describes itself as "a Christian journal, conservative in doctrine and eclectic in content...". In the June issue of Touchstone, Senior Editor Patrick Henry Reardon wrote:

"The Gospel according to Mark accords two things Jesus did on Monday of the last week of his earthly life. He cursed and dried up the fig tree, and he purged the Temple.

"He got in a lot of trouble for what he did in the Temple.

"He would be in trouble, nowadays, for what he did to the fig tree."
(Touchstone, A Journal of Mere Christianity, The Fellowship of St. James, Vol. 31, Number 3, May/June 2018, p. 4.)

Well, think about what we are seeing: The absurd extremes of political and social correctness - the conflicting voices of the day - disenchantment, especially with the Word of God. And a lot of noise from voices within the church. We're looking at . . .

RABBLE BABBLE, THE CHURCH AND ITS PENCHANT FOR INCONGRUITY, AND THE LOVE OF GOD

I. The Rabble.

Our text begins with, "Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving." (v. 4) The dictionary defines "rabble" as "a disorganized or disorderly crowd of people: MOB." Forget the "disorganized" part. They were, without question, "disorderly". Commentators Keil & Delitzsch call them "the mob that had come out of Egypt along with the Israelites." Perhaps, some of these were people who had intermarried with the Israelites, or simply non-Israelites who wanted out of Egypt. P. E. Kretzmann writes that they were "seized with a violent longing for some of the sensual delights that lay behind them...". (Kretzmann, Popular Commentary of the Bible, Old Testament, Vol. I., p. 356) You know, longing for the "good old days". In other words, their flesh was not being satisfied in the way they had anticipated.

And they babbled. Webster has a couple of pertinent definitions of "babble". (1) "To talk enthusiastically or excessively." We'll go with the "excessively". (2) "To reveal by talk that is too free." Loose tongues! So I'm going with a "disorderly mob" that was excessive and unguarded in their complaints. The babble of the rabble: Rabble Babble!

In the July/August issue of Touchstone, Senior Editor, S. M. Hutchens wrote an editorial entitled "Swimming with Sharks, The Politics of Power, Pleasure & Atheism". He wrote . . .

Many Americans who hold to old concepts of virtue have been caught out by a paradigm shift - a cheat - carried out by the left on a scale whose magnitude they have difficulty comprehending: an earlier day's liberalism has now become atheism. The evidence of this is seen in the abandonment by the left (and I cannot exclude a percentage of the right) of moral norms that were once common to both left and right. In place of such norms the left has substituted the pleasure principle of the sixties and the struggle for political power... (Vol. 31, Number 4, July/August 2018, p. 4)

His reference to "the pleasure principles of the 60's" refers to free sex, use of drugs and the right to abortion which made their public debut in the 1960's. Let's call it *Flower Power Philosophy*. Hutchens closes the article with this warning:

We do well to remember this in all our dealings with the left - as we were called upon to do with Rousseau, Lenin, and Hitler - whether it is asserting the goodness of sexual confusion in the churches (that is, the *left's* movement to coerce the church to accept all sexual preferences), or the right to abortion in the houses of state (that is, pressuring government to protect the right to abortion). The implications of this paradigm shift are bottomless. We are foolish if we nostalgically attempt to pretend they are not. (Ibid., p.5)

This is the Rabble. It always has its presence, and often its fists, in the face of the church. And then follows this . . .

II. The Church.

And the people of Israel also wept again and said, "Oh that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at." (vv. 4-11)

"The people of Israel" - that is, the visible church of the Old Testament - "wept again and said..". Complained. Outrageously exaggerated their complaints as sinful humans often do: "the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing..."! And this: "there is nothing at all but this manna to look at." Thumbs down on God's miraculous provision! As we know, they were enslaved, inflicted with suffering from the Egyptians, constantly crying out! There should be no doubt about it: the "rabble" influenced and agitated the spirit of God's people.

We should understand that this has always been part of the church's life through all the centuries; that is to say, what claims to be God's people, unhappy with their lot or tired of the same old Word and Worship. And the rabble is always theirs to aid and abet!! Or, as a Lutheran pastor once said to me many years ago: "We've got to be more like the world if we are going to win the world." And so, pulpits today are filled with abortionists, filled with those demeaning traditional marriage and family values, filled with intense criticism of the Word of God.

I entitled this section of the sermon ***the church and its penchant for incongruity***. Webster gives several perspectives on the word "incongruous". I'm going with this one: "not conforming: DISAGREEING conduct." And that is what much of the church is today: Unwilling to conform to and disagreeing with the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures. Using sly euphemisms such as "contemporary" or "enhanced" worship, staying "relevant" and this which appeared in a church bulletin: "an effective worship activity must relate to the audience of the day in a changing culture." Our culture isn't simply changing. It's the mirror image of cultures that have risen and fallen through all the centuries!! And a good part of the reason is **the babble of the rabble!**

III. The Love of God.

I must tell you, on behalf of both pastors, it is one of the most comforting aspects of what we do when we are privileged to conduct the funeral of a brother or sister in Christ to have with us faith family, such as you, gathered in these pews. To know and share what those now in eternity knew and held to: "Your Word (the Scriptures alone) is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Ps. 119:105)

From the Word are these truths and promises: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:23) - "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 3:23-24) "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast." (Eph. 2:8-9) It will be for us as it was for our departed brothers and sisters - as it was for Lazarus: "The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side." (Lk. 16:22) Heaven! Eternal life!

And we remember the rich man who was in hell and cried out to Abraham: “send him (Lazarus) to my father’s house - for I have five brothers - so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.” (Lk. 16:27-28) Think of it - what spewed out of the damned soul’s mouth! What innovation from a person in hell! Something spectacular and seemingly convincing. A person from heaven coming back to earth to win the culture to Jesus!

And then came Abraham’s response: “They (the rich man’s brothers) have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.” (v. 29) They have the Word of God! And Abraham says, “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.” (v. 31) So much for the new, the innovative, the spectacular, the relevance of human wisdom.

I would assume that most everyone here is very familiar with the account of Jesus at the home of Martha whose sister Mary was also present. And we know that Martha was distracted by the preparation and serving. The words of Jesus to Martha are attached to our names as well: “(Bill) you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary...”. (Lk. 10:41-42) One thing and only one thing: **The Word** - Jesus as we receive Him in the Written and Spoken Word and Visible Word of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper! If the Means of Grace are not sufficient as they stand alone, then nothing is and never will be. The church must never acquiesce, or appease the world’s wants and thinking. So much for the babble of the rabble.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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for Incongruity, and the Love of God***

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III. The Love of God.

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