

Good morning! This is Sunny Ahn, the Senior Pastor at Kona United Methodist Church. I am glad that you are with us this morning. Let me start today's message with a short story.

[Story] Mrs. Smith is known for grumbling and complaining about everyone and everything. Pastor John finally thought he had something she could not complain about. Her crop of potatoes was the best for miles around. Surely, she would have nothing to complain about for once, he thought. So, Pastor John approached Mrs. Smith and said, "Mrs. Smith! Everyone is talking about how great a crop of potatoes you have. How great it is, isn't it?" "Yes," she said, "but I don't have the bad potatoes for the pigs!"

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I think we, Americans, are like Mrs. Smith, complaining a lot. The Pilgrims and Puritans came to America because they were complaining about religious authority. We fought for our independence complaining about political authority. And not only it is in our history; it's our fundamental right to complain in America. John F. Kennedy first articulated our four basic consumer rights in a 1950 speech, and Congress went on to enact them in law. One of those rights is the right to complain. We don't just complain as individual consumers. Americans are really good at complaining as groups.

Somewhere along the way we, as a society, figured out that we can get more done by complaining. The first 2020 presidential debate last week we watched surely has demonstrated the powerful tool of collective complaining. It was very painful to watch the debate if that was a debate.

Surprisingly, the most familiar, the most beloved scripture in the Bible, John 3:16, we have today is immediately introduced by the climax of Israelites' complaint story in the wilderness (Numbers 21:4-9), "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up."

The story is like this. God rescues His chosen people and brings them out of slavery in Egypt. In the wilderness, God, out of bountiful mercy and goodness,

provides for them with manna and quail to eat and water from out of the rock to drink. But they are ungrateful, and they grumble against Moses and against God: “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!”

They no longer have faith in Moses or faith in God. As punishment for their falling away from faith, for their rebellion, and their ungratefulness, God provides fiery snakes to bite the people, and many of them die.

Like those ancient people in the wilderness, haven't we rebelled against the Lord our God? We too are often ungrateful. We often see the half cup empty instead of the half cup full. And we complain! We like to blame others for our problems. It beats the hard work of self-assessment. Grumbling at God for our predicament comes more naturally than asking God for help. How quickly we become discouraged and impatient toward our gracious God, as did the Israelites in the desert (Numbers 21:4-5)! Because of our sin, our rebellion, our ungratefulness, we too deserve punishment, don't we? We too deserve death for our sin.

God has superhuman patience, but He will not forever put up with those who spurn His love. He sent deadly serpents to punish the grumbling Israelites (Numbers 21:6). Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were also fatally 'bitten' by a snake. They have passed on to all of us the curse of original sin, which poisons our lives, cuts them short, and embitters them. God could have left the situation right there, but He did not.

The people in the wilderness repent and confess their sin to Moses: “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.” God has compassion on them. By God's command, Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. It looked like the source of death, but by God's power it somehow neutralized or nullified the poison in their bodies and gave them new life when they looked up the lifted bronze snake in faith!

God also has compassion for you and I, He also gives us a cure for our sin, a remedy to save us from death: “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.” The bronze snake hanging on a pole in the desert is a picture-prophecy. It points forward to the Savior hanging on a cross.

The Son of Man was also lifted up. Hanging on a criminal's cross, He looked like a sinful human (Romans 8:3), but He was a truly righteous Man who took on Himself the curse of our sin (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13). Just as everyone who looked at the bronze snake was cured and lived, everyone who looks to the Son of God and believes in Him has eternal life.

In faith, let us look up to the crucified Christ, now raised and forever glorified. In Him is light and life everlasting, overpowering all darkness and disease. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him" (John 3:16-17). Let it be so to us today as we partake in communion. *Consecration of the Lord's Table!*