

I sometimes wonder if grumbling isn't a New Zealand pastime? In fact, not just a pastime but a Kiwi national institution. We hear it all the time. The latest, greatest, and most long-lasting grumbles is always about the All Blacks. The gods of New Zealand culture. The most recent tirade has been around the coaching staff. Ian Foster; he's hopeless! Useless! Should have gotten rid of him years ago! It should be Scott Robertson, Jamie Joseph, Leon MacDonald, Eddie Jones!

Then Ian Foster; he's been treated abysmally. The recent appointment process for the coaching staff is a joke. The NZRU are a pack of clowns! Even the appointment of Dame Patsy Reddy, the ex-Governor General hasn't done anything to improve the pack of idiots running New Zealand rugby.

Then we move on to: the banks are robbing us blind. The supermarkets cheat us at every turn. Jacinda is the devil. The vilest woman on the planet. Chris Hipkins is a fill in. The Labour government is useless, worse than useless. Christopher Luxon is a muppet. He's boring, entitled and hasn't a clue about ordinary kiwis.

We are good at grumbling. Us kiwis.

You only need to read the Letters to the Editor in the Herald to catch a little of this. The same old names appear, over and over and over again. Hilton Le Grice. Greg Cave. Bruce Elliot. Gary Hollis. The perennial Reg Dempster; absolutely obsessed with the Labour Party. And then Jock McVicar!

Now this is not to say that our grumbles are not justified. In fact, some are more than justified, they are declarations of injustice. But we kiwis are very good at declaring injustice ... over and over and over again.

And then there is my personal favourite. The short pithy grumble that I spew forth whenever the mood takes me. Usually, 10-15 times a day.

"He's a moron, the world is full of them."

Janet and I were in Cardiff on holiday. We were in the UK visiting Janet's cousin and her husband, I'm a bit of a cricket fan, and John is a bit of a sports nut too, so as a part of our holiday we got a couple of tickets to go watch the Black Caps play Bangladesh in an ICC Champions Trophy game in Cardiff. Janet and Mandy hit the shops.

While we were in Cardiff, we came across some other kiwis staying at the same hotel as us. They were the most miserable people God had ever put breathe into. They had obviously been away from the farm for a while, and they couldn't wait to get back. The food was no good. The service was poor. The weather was crap. They didn't like the beer. They couldn't understand the accents. NZ lost the cricket.

I tell you what, I stood it for about 5 minutes, and then that was that. Morons, the world's full of them!

We are good at grumbling.

In our text from Exodus, the people of Israel are good at grumbling too. Here they grumble about not having any water. Previously they have grumbled about having no food. Now neither of these complaints are small, insignificant or value less. Everyone needs food and water to survive, but the grumbling does exhibit a distinct lack of trust in the God who has called them out in to the wilderness. And let's not forget, at their own pleading and prayers. "How long oh Lord, how long will you leave us in Egypt. How long will you turn your face from us and forget us."

It seemed they had forgotten it was God who wished them free from slavery. Had forgotten it was God who protected them from the plagues of Egypt. Had forgotten it was God that had parted the Red Sea.

It seemed they had forgotten it was God who had led them in the desert with a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night.

And in all this forgetting, they grumbled. They even say, "Is the Lord with us or not?"

The church grumbles. We grumble and fight over where the water comes from. What hill to worship on. Who we can be married to. Whether men can speak to women or not. Whether women can speak at all. What food to eat.

We forget God has provided us with living water to drink. God's Spirit to worship in. Food to eat that the world knows nothing of. Jesus' death and resurrection, each and every week.

We grumble, and we even say, "Is the Lord with us or not?"

I have been watching a women's prison drama on TV, for my viewing pleasure this last week or so, and the other day, there was a scene in which one of the prisoners goes to see her Counsellor. Now neither of these two people are paragons of virtue. The Counsellor, just as much a criminal as the woman in front of him, but he's had a bit of an epiphany and is trying to do better.

So, the prisoner comes in to see him with a request about the prison paper which she is getting going. She fully expects him to turn down her request, but in the spirit of the epiphany he has had, he says yes, and agrees to it.

Then he points to a large jar on his desk, another innovation, gives her a piece of paper and asks her to write down the feeling word, that describes how she is in that moment.

After a slight pause, she scribbles away.

As the camera pans back, she holds up the little piece of paper, written on it is one word ...

Grateful ...

The Counsellor looks at her and says, "It's a good word, Chapman."

"Grateful, it's a good word, New Zealand."

Amen.