

1 Corinthians 10:1-13
Third Sunday in Lent
Don't Forget the Past

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Winchester, VA
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For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ² They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³ They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

⁶ Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry." ⁸ We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. ⁹ We should not test Christ, ^d as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. ¹⁰ And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.

¹¹ These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. ¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

There's an expression which most of us have heard in one form or another that goes along the lines of: "Those who don't learn history (or can't remember the past) are doomed to repeat it." Then there's also an abridged version, simply, "history repeats itself." It's true on a basic level when you think about many of the ways in which we learn from our own personal experience. If we remember what it looked and felt like just before it started to rain, then the next time we see and sense those things we'll take along an umbrella. If we get an electric shock, or burn our hand on a hot surface, we're likely to be extra careful the next time we handle whatever it was that shocked or burned us.

"History repeats itself" is true in a much grander and far reaching sense too. Because human nature has remained more or less the same throughout the centuries of our existence, we're able to learn not only from our own failures or successes, but also from the failures and successes of our ancestors and others who came before us.

That's what St. Paul wished to communicate to the Christians in Corinth when he wrote our second lesson this morning. He wanted to express to them how similar they were to God's ancient people of Israel so that by studying Israel's history, they could learn from the past and make application to their own lives.

He starts out with some very inclusive language in verse 1. He says, **I want you to know, brothers and sisters, about our ancestors.** Now remember, the Corinthians were Greeks, they were Gentiles, not Israelites. Yet Paul was able to call them his brothers and sisters and refer to their common ancestors because while their nationalities and lineage may have been different, they still had something very important in common with the Jews whom God had led out of slavery in Egypt some 1500 years

earlier—by God’s grace they had become members of His Church, His holy people, His family. And same truth, my brothers and sisters, applies to you as well!

If ever anyone had overwhelming proof that God in His love had chosen them to be His own, that He wanted to be their God and for them to be His people, it was that generation of Hebrews whom He delivered out of slavery in Egypt. Just think of the incredible demonstrations of God’s love that they had witnessed, beginning with the Ten Plagues which God used to compel the Pharaoh to release them from their slavery, to the parting of the Red Sea so that they could cross over on dry land preserving them again from Pharaoh and his army, and then the fact that the Lord God Almighty Himself was guiding them with a pillar of cloud by day and a fiery pillar by night! Those events, Paul says, were like a special kind of Baptism for the Israelites. Who among them could question whether they were one of God’s people after all that He had done for them?

You are no less privileged. That was Paul’s message for the Corinthians and it’s my message for you today. We are no less privileged than those people who passed through the waters of the Red Sea and were led by God through the wilderness because we have passed through the waters of Holy Baptism and are led by the Holy Word of the Lord God Almighty Himself. The miracle that God has worked in you through His Gospel of rescuing you from slavery to sin and death and hell is just as great as any miracle recorded in pages of Scripture.

And that wasn’t the only testimony of God’s grace that the Israelites had enjoyed. Paul continues in verse 3, saying, **They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.** For forty years, God provided miraculously for His people sending them manna from heaven in the morning and flocks of quail by night. When there was nothing for them to drink, He provided water for them from the rock that Moses struck at Kadesh. But the manna, and the rock which split open to provide them with water were only symbols, only instruments, of the greater Rock who accompanied them—Christ, the second person of the Trinity. It was Christ, through His servant Moses, that delivered them out of slavery, and it was Christ, through the miraculous food and drink who preserved them in the wilderness.

You are no less privileged. Again, Paul’s message for the Corinthians is the same as God’s message for you today. We too have the privilege of eating and drinking spiritual food again and again—food which nourishes us and preserves us in the sinful wilderness of this world—the strengthening, Life-giving gospel of God’s grace and His own body and blood given for us in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Our needs, both for now and for eternity, have been provided for by our merciful Savior.

But then we get to verse 5, and Paul’s message takes a dramatic shift: **Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.** Out of the hundreds of thousands whom God had led out of slavery in Egypt, Joshua and Caleb were the only two over the age of twenty to take possession of the Promised Land. Why? Because despite all the great signs of God’s gracious love that they had witnessed with their own eyes, they took that grace for granted and turned aside to evil things.

These things, Paul continues, occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.” ⁸ We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. ⁹ We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. ¹⁰ And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.

The Israelites sinned against God. They didn't remember His grace and His mercy so they turned away from Him, disobeyed His will, and met their consequences. It's interesting to note that the sins Paul points to from the Israelites' past: idolatry, revelry, adultery, and complaining and grumbling about their leaders, are all sins which Paul had to specifically address with the Corinthian congregation. History repeats itself. Those of us who don't remember the past, will be doomed to the same. Those same sinful tendencies which the Israelites had fallen prey to in the wilderness were manifesting themselves now in the Corinthian congregation and Paul's message to them was clear: ¹¹ **These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. ¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!**

As sobering as it is that the Corinthians were subject to the same temptations as the Israelites had been the same is still true for us in 21st century America. Perhaps one of the biggest examples of idolatry that comes to mind with the Israelites was less than a year after God had led them out of Egypt. When Moses went up onto Mt. Sinai to meet with the Lord, the people grew tired of waiting for him to return so they made a golden calf and began worshipping it instead. As we wait for our Lord's return, we grow impatient or stop longing for Him altogether. We turn to what we have right in front of us and make gods out of that, dedicating our time and our passion to the things of this world.

And just as both the Corinthians and the Israelites were susceptible to temptations of the flesh, adultery has never ceased to be a temptation for members of God's household. Marriages are broken or tainted even before they began through extra-marital sexual relations. The unprecedented array of pornographic images and videos today coupled with their ready availability have not made the battle to keep oneself sexually pure any easier. Nor has the society we find ourselves in today which glorifies sexuality and elevates and praises sexual perversions.

And when we look to the history of God's people and see that even the self-serving or self-pitying grumbles and complaints of those were not satisfied with the status quo were met with divine retribution and death, we're confronted with the awful truth that our sins against God, even those we may think flippantly of, are no small matter. God dealt severely with His children in the wilderness as an example for us. And those examples were recorded so that we might have a warning that our God is not one who treats sin lightly. His message couldn't be clearer: **If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!**

With all these sinful failures repeating generation after generation, from ancient Israel to first century Corinth to twenty first century America, you might understandably find yourself asking, "What hope, then, do we as sinful people have? Is history bound to just go on repeating itself again and again? If since Creation, humans have failed to live according to God's will, what could now possibly make any of that change?"

In the final verse of our passage, Paul has the answer: **No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.** Yes, the temptations you face—even those you will find yourself faced with later this afternoon or throughout the week—are but different manifestations of the same common temptation that has faced mankind since Satan tempted the first man in the Garden of Eden: serve yourself rather than God.

But God is faithful. Always, since that first sin in the Garden of Eden, He has remained true to His promise to serve us. And so it was in another garden, called Gethsemane, thousands of years later, that the faithfulness of our God was beginning to be revealed. Another man was tempted there, faced with the unimaginable peril of suffering for the sins of every human who had lived or would ever come to live. He was faced with God's wrath over the sins of the Israelites and the Greeks, and over your sins

and mine, and yet He knew that this was God's plan to rescue us from that deep slavery to death and hell so He turned aside from the temptation to serve Himself and said, **Father, not My will, but Yours be done** (Lk 22:42).

God is faithful! That is the sweet gospel message He wants you to take to heart. When you are tempted, He empowers you through His Spirit to say, "no," to evil and, "yes," to what is right. When you do what is right, it is His power living in you that enables you to do it—the power He filled you with when He brought you into His family through Baptism and the Word. And when you fall to temptation and do what is evil in the sight of your Lord, it is He, your faithful God, who forgives you your sins because in His faithfulness He has already borne their punishment on the cross.

To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

**The peace of God, which transcends all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.**