

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity
1 Corinthians 10:6-13: "God Is Faithful."
August 8/9, 2020 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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O God, You are faithful to Your people and do not permit them to be tempted above that they are able, but with the temptation also makes a way of escape that they may be able to bear it: We humbly entreat You to strengthen us Your servants with Your heavenly aid and keep us with Your continual protection; that we may evermore wait on You, and never by any temptation be drawn away from You, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Parish Prayers*, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 114)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the tenth chapter of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "*The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.*" We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. / Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, whose faithfulness does not depend on our good behavior, but on His perfect love toward us, dear fellow redeemed:

The Bible is a big book. If you have been following the two-year Bible reading plan since the year began, you are only about a quarter of the way through it. But that is to be expected of a collection of writings that covers thousands and thousands of years of human history. As much as we have in the Bible, just think how much has been left out! What we have in the Bible is what God wanted us to have, no more and no less. We can assume that every part, every detail, has a purpose, even those details that may seem unimportant or even tedious.

The apostle Paul highlights this in his First Letter to the Corinthians. He wrote about the Israelites and their experiences after leaving Egypt and setting off for the Promised Land. He recounted God's faithfulness to them and their rejection of Him (10:1-5). Then Paul wrote that the Old Testament is more than a record of history; "*these things took place as examples for us,*" he said. These events were just a few among many. But they were specifically recorded for our

benefit. As Paul states, *"Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction."*

The first example of Israel's sinfulness that Paul raised was how the Israelites *"desired evil,"* or *"craved evil things."* It wasn't long after they had been freed from slavery that the Israelites complained and thought they would be better off in Egypt than in the wilderness (Exo. 14:12). Later on they despised the food God miraculously provided them 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"* (Num. 11:4-5). The Israelites desired what they did not have and despised what they did.

This covetous thinking was idolatry. "Idolatry" is a heavy word. When you hear that word, you might picture people worshiping idols of wood or silver or gold. Paul refers to the time when the Israelites made and worshiped a golden calf. He quotes the Old Testament book of Exodus where it describes their feasting and celebrating before this false god: *"The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play"* (32:6). But how could they worship a metal calf? You and I cannot imagine doing that.

We may not do that, but we certainly have idols. Idolatry is placing one's fear, love, or trust in anything above the true God. In his *Large Catechism*, Martin Luther said that *"whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your god."* What idols do you have or are you tempted to have? A way to identify them is to ask yourself what you cannot bear the thought of losing. Is it your house or your possessions? Could you live without access to the internet? Has another person become your idol? Or is it perhaps yourself? Could it be maintaining good health or pursuing your own plans that you elevate above all else? Idolatry is not just a thing of the past or a weakness of more "primitive" cultures. It is found everywhere.

Idolatry often forms in the thoughts and imaginations of an individual's heart. But it can also catch on within a community. Think about the golden calf incident. I can't imagine that every individual simultaneously had the idea to worship an animal statue. Rather this person followed the lead of that person who followed the lead of that person and so on. Maybe they thought to themselves: *"If she's taking part, it must be alright."* *"Everybody's doing it, so who am I to say no?"* *"If it's okay with him, it's okay with me."*

Paul provides another example of this when he refers to the unbelieving women of Moab enticing the Israelites to join them in their worship of Baal. This worship involved ritual prostitution (Num. 25). Paul plainly states the sin and its result: *"We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day."* It is difficult to go against the crowd, especially when the sin looks so appealing, or when it does not seem all that serious. Today we are tempted to go along with or look the other way regarding things like pornography use, living together outside of marriage, or any other sexual sin that the unbelieving world embraces but the holy God condemns.

Finally Paul mentions two other times when the Israelites grumbled and complained against God and His servant Moses (Num. 21 & 14 or 16). They trusted their own wisdom about things and were destroyed for this idolatry. These events *"were written down for our instruction."* They are a warning to us, both of how we are tempted to sin and how God punishes sin.

As we consider these examples, it would be a mistake for us to think we are nothing like those Israelites. We want to believe we could not fall like they did. But by nature, we are no different than they were. Today's text exposes the idolatry of our own hearts. It speaks to our prideful thinking that we are more faithful than others are, that we can keep ourselves from serious sins, that we could withstand any temptation. Paul writes, *"Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."*

Then he adds, *"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man."* The temptations that have overtaken you and me were not monumental, unique temptations that barely got the better of us. They were *"common"* temptations, ones that have ensnared many people before us and will ensnare many after us. Paul is saying that if you cannot even hold the line against these common temptations, how could you think you would fare differently than the Israelites did?

But as we are confronted with our idolatry, with our sin against the mighty God, Paul also reminds us of this: **"God Is Faithful."** Perfect faithfulness is one of the special attributes of God. The Bible is full of references to His faithfulness. The LORD used this word to describe Himself as He passed before Moses on the mountain. He called Himself *"a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness"* (Exo. 34:6).

But it's one thing to say and another to do. God demonstrated His faithfulness by keeping His promise to send a Savior for the world of sinners. Even when the Israelites had rejected Him and turned away to other gods, His promise to them and all people remained in effect. He would send His only Son to suffer and die for all sin. If there were any questions about God's faithfulness, those were removed when the Son of God became Man in the virgin Mary's womb. He came to show how long and high and deep God's love for mankind truly is.

God's faithfulness to His promise meant that Jesus had to be punished for the Israelites' sins and for our sins. Jesus perfectly loved and honored His heavenly Father, and yet God punished Him for our idolatry, for our setting our hearts on the things of this world. Jesus remained perfectly pure in His actions, words, and thoughts, and yet He endured the judgment of God for our sexual misdeeds. Jesus never complained about the work He was given to do, and yet He was accused for our reluctance and resentment to do what He has called us to do.

Jesus stood in for us and took our punishment because He was perfectly faithful to His Father. He would not let Himself be sidetracked. He would not put His own well-being before ours. He eagerly obeyed His Father's commands, so that we would be covered in His righteousness. And He willingly went to the cross, so that we would be forgiven of all our sins.

But if God is so faithful to forgive our sins, why didn't He do the same for the Israelites? Why were they destroyed? Each time the Israelites sinned against God in those grievous ways, He called them to repent. Some of them did and were spared. Others defied the holy God and were condemned. The same goes for us. If we continue in our sins and ignore God's Word, we will face His wrath. So we pray that He humbles us through the Law, so that we repent of our sins. And we trust His faithful promise that all our sins were blotted out by the precious blood of Jesus.

“God Is Faithful.” This means that *“He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”* Some mistakenly understand this as saying that “God will not give you more than you can handle.” But that puts the focus more on your inner strength, on your effort, than on God’s faithfulness. Paul is not telling you here that “God will not give you more than you can handle.” (You probably have more than you can handle every single day!)

The inspired words of Paul comfort you with the assurance that “God will not give you more than He can handle.” Isn’t that what the text says? *“He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability... He will provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”* God provides the way out. He gets you past the temptations. He is the one who guards and keeps you, so the devil, the world, and your own flesh do not get the better of you. And when you do fall, He is faithful to call you back to Him through His Word to be cleansed by His holy blood and covered again in His righteousness.

In a letter to a fellow pastor, Paul reminded him that *“if we are faithless, [God] remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself” (2Ti. 2:13)*. This is your God, the true God, the God who is and ever will be faithful to His gracious promises toward you.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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