

Third Sunday in Lent
March 24, 2019
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

1 Corinthians 10:1-13 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, 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.

“Rely on Your Faithful God”

Trust is a precious commodity in our world today. Being disappointed and let down are so common, we almost default to a skeptical attitude toward most claims.

Recent reports have brought to light serious flaws with the Boeing 737 Max that led to the recent crashes. Instead of building a new aircraft from scratch, the company took some shortcuts. They decided to add new engines to an existing aircraft and compensate for this tendency to stall with new software to detect when it happens. Boeing was able to pitch the concept of an airplane almost exactly the same as the 737 so pilots didn’t need to go through extensive training like they would on brand new aircraft. Unfortunately, we see the consequences of those accumulated shortcuts. Two deadly crashes later and many more anxious passengers don’t trust decisions made by the people who are responsible for carrying people through the skies at hundreds of miles an hour.¹

In First Corinthians chapter 10, the Apostle Paul points us to our God who is trustworthy. At all times. In all circumstances. Paul gives us this refreshing certainty after bringing God’s people through a bit of a gut-check. He uses examples from Israel’s history to show the disastrous effects of people trusting in themselves. History lessons are meant to teach. He wants to show us what a fully engaged faith looks like. Faith is not just a connection to God.

¹ Fernholz, Tim. “The Boeing 737 Max Crisis Goes Way Beyond Software.” Quartz, 2019 March 23. Accessed: <https://qz.com/1577986/the-boeing-737-max-crisis-goes-way-beyond-software/>

Faith is fully reliant on the One who has a 100% perfect faithfulness track record. It's important for you and me as we live out our calling from God today. Rely on your faithful God.

The first thing that stands out in these verses is that Paul is addressing fellow Christians. They might be relatively new Christians in the city of Corinth. They might not have obvious connections to believers from hundreds of years ago from a different country, but he wants them to realize that all believers over the centuries and cultures that separate us share some things in common. So he expresses concern for them in a way that shows urgency: **"For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters."** (1 Corinthians 10:1) He wants to warn them against the assumption that believers can't fall away from the faith.

1 Corinthians 10:6-10 give 5 different examples of times when God's people in Old Testament times fell into dangerous temptations. It seems most likely that Paul has some very specific situations in mind from Israel's history. In verse 6 when he brings up: **"setting our hearts on evil things as they did"** it appears to be a reference to Numbers 11:4-6,31-34 Kirbroth Hattaavah when people were complaining about the conditions in the desert and wished they could be back in Egypt eating meat and vegetables even though it would have exposed them to slavery, idolatry and impurities. Verse 7 when **"The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry"** is a reference to the Golden Calf episode in Exodus chapter 32. While Moses was absent from the group receiving God's commands on Mount Sinai, the people grew impatient and started a feast that led to idolatry and adultery. The episode in which so many **"commit sexual immorality"** and God struck down over 20,000 of them refers to Numbers chapter 25 when the Moabites couldn't curse Israel so they seduced them with self-indulgence which led to idol worship and sexual sins (1 Corinthians 10:8). There were plenty of times when they tested God. But the time that their testing ended with many being bitten by poisonous snakes happened in Numbers 21 when they despised God's gifts and pushed the boundaries of freedom. There was also plenty of grumbling as Paul talks about in verse 10. But the time Paul seems to be talking about when many were destroyed fits best with Numbers 16 when Korah, Dathan and Abiram led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron and representatives of God's authority.

Depending on your attitude toward history, this might be fascinating or as dry as dirt. You have heard people say that history repeats itself. Another popular quote says *"Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it."* (George Santayana) For God's children, there is more to lessons from the past than not taking shortcuts when building a new aircraft or reading the newspaper and hearing about the latest case of embezzlement or even watching a classmate get in trouble for cheating on a test. There are dangers of not paying attention to lessons God is giving us.

Paul says the **"occurred as examples"** for us (1 Corinthians 10:6). More literally they are "types." There are lots of "types" throughout Scripture. Some of them are people in the Old Testament like Moses or King David who point us ahead to the person of Jesus. Others are actions like sacrifices of lambs or the whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament that point ahead to the work of Jesus. Then there are plenty of prophecies or prophets

themselves who trigger those lightbulb moments for us and make us at least think of Jesus. So “types” can be good or bad. They can get our attention and make us think of God’s powerful acts either in judgment or salvation.

So in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, Paul isn’t just giving a history lesson. He is giving very pointed warnings. God’s people today just like the believers in Corinth 2,000 years ago might never have to wander through the desert and face the exact same situations the Israelites did. But we wonder in our hearts if life wouldn’t be easier and more comfortable if we kept some of the standards of the unbelieving world. When we grow impatient with God coming to us and giving us what we want as the Israelites did waiting for Moses, we can create our own substitutes for God. We can let down our guard and give in to self-indulgence without considering the costs to our souls. We can easily grumble and complain about God’s gifts to us, start to push the boundaries of the freedom we have from God. We can complain about God’s authority over us and start to rebel against scriptural authority or the church’s ministers who serve us.

Paul’s point in making a connection between us today and the Israelites back then is so we realize we all face dangers in our faith. We need to take temptation seriously. Typically though, there are three dangerous ways of handling those temptations. We can be so comfortable in ourselves we don’t take them seriously. We can grow proud of the faith we have that we get overconfident. On the other side we can feel so overwhelmed by temptations that we seem so overmatched that we don’t even put up a fight.

Let’s address the last one first. This past week I heard an official describing what precautions they could have taken to avoid the flooding that happened in the Midwest recently. He couldn’t think of anything. There was nothing they could have build and no project they can undertake in the future that would have prevented this flooding. For believers, we know temptations will come. We can’t prevent them. But if we don’t prepare, they will flood over us. If we don’t set up healthy boundaries, they will swamp us. But it doesn’t have to be this devastating.

Then there is the danger of believing we are just fine. We are God’s children and nothing can damage us. Think of the situations Jesus describes in Luke chapter 13. We don’t know the exact situations or why people brought them up to Jesus. But we know a natural reaction would be to feel safe being a survivor. People naturally assume karma is true. If I was one of those people spared, I must in some way be superior to the people who were victims.

Then there is the danger of feeling overconfident. Believers can point to past performance under pressure. We can get an inflated sense of our own abilities. Think of how many times Philippians 4:13 is misquoted and abused: **“I can do all everything through him who gives me strength.”** (NIV 1984) Peter was invited to walk out on the Sea of Galilee by Jesus. But as soon as he looked down, he started to sink (Matthew 14:22-36).

Paul’s point in bringing up examples of believers from the past is to show us our problematic reactions are dangerous. When we think there is no use trying to resist

temptation or we feel like we can handle temptations all by ourselves, we put ourselves at risk. Paul shares the result of unfaithfulness of the Israelites: **“Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.”** (1 Corinthians 10:6) The problem is the failure to look to the right place for help.

Paul points us to our faithful God: **“God is faithful.”** (1 Corinthians 10:13) God’s faithfulness is seen best in Jesus Christ. Jesus never desired anything besides what his Father planned for his earthly existence. Jesus never grew impatient with the Father’s timing to excuse taking matters into his own hands. Instead, the more he prayed in Gethsemane, the more he learned to accept the Father’s negative answer to his prayers (Matthew 26:36-46). Jesus never indulged his own desires at the expense of other people, but always put the needs of others before his own. Jesus never grumbled against God’s gifts to him. Jesus never rebelled against God’s authority for his life.

Jesus wasn’t just faithful to give us a pattern to follow or show us his example. Jesus teaches us to rely completely on his faithfulness. In the Bible testing isn’t like spring training for baseball or scouting reports for football players where they have to impress coaches and show they deserve to be on the team. Biblical testing isn’t like a work evaluation where you are overcome by fear trying to prove you belong or have earned a better position. Biblical testing is designed to show what you have. Actually, it’s more about who you have. You have a faithful God who went into battle against temptation for you. You have a God who tangled with trials and came out victorious after the cross and Easter’s empty grave. Instead, biblical testing is often described as purging and purifying. It purges away the self-doubt and fear when it shows you a conquering Christ. It strips you of your pride when it shows you Jesus did what no one human being has done or will ever do again. Testing and trials teach us to rely on our faithful God.

There are certain extreme sports that I might never try. But whether it is bungee jumping or skydiving or rock climbing, there is more in common between them than simply trying to defy death. You need to trust in your equipment. You might carefully follow the instructions on packing your parachute and listen attentively when the instructor is telling you what to do once you jump out of that airplane. But after that, you are only as safe as your equipment.

God is faithful. In your life of faith, rely completely and unashamedly on your Savior. As you climb through life, God is your harness hanging onto you. When you trust in yourself and fail miserably, God is there to catch you with his forgiveness in Jesus Christ. When you get too comfortable and get in over your head, trust in God to pull you to safety.

The Apostle Paul uses some curious descriptions of the blessings God’s people had even when they were wandering in the wilderness. They were baptized into Moses (1 Corinthians 10:2) and ate and drank spiritual food (1 Corinthians 10:3,4). Being baptized into Christ doesn’t insulate your life from trials and temptations. But it does mean you are connected to the life and death of Jesus Christ. You have a living and growing relationship with your Savior. Your baptismal faith keeps you in a constant state of reliance on your faithful God. And God invites you to keep coming back again and again. Receive his gifts of

grace in his Word and Sacraments. Enjoy the privileges of your relationship with Jesus. Throughout all your life rely on your faithful God. Amen.