

March 3, 2013
Lent 3

"Our God Is Faithful"

1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-13

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers 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 over the desert. 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 pagan 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 the Lord, 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 fulfillment 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 seized you except what is common to man. 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 stand up under it.

The latest Smithsonian magazine has an article about a retired anthropology professor from UCSB who is being severely criticized for a book he has written about a remote jungle tribe in the Amazon. The book chronicles the ruthless behavior of these native people, the sexual immorality, cruelty and even murder. The humanist likes to think that native tribes are kind and loving and generous with each other. History shows us there were some native tribes in our country that showed kindness and love. There were others who were ruthless in the treatment of other tribes.

The Bible does not sugar coat and hide the evil that shows itself in people. God's Word records how the first child ever born into this world killed his brother. It shows us the great king David, a man after God's heart, committing adultery with Bathsheba and then murdering her husband. It records how God's Old Testament people were constant being unfaithful and turning against the Lord.

The dear Christians in Corinth were in danger of becoming proud, unloving, immoral and reverting back to worshiping idols. Even though most of them were Gentiles, Paul takes them back into the history of the Jewish people to show them the danger of turning against the Lord. It has been said that those who ignore history are destined to repeat it. Today we want Paul to lead us to see how people in the past were unfaithful and how the Lord always remains faithful.

People are unfaithful

"For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were under the cloud and that all passed through the sea." It is important to remember the history of God's people. When they left the land of Egypt and traveled to the Promised Land they were under the cloud. They actually had a cloud follow them during the day and a pillar of fire by night. They did not need a GPS system. They were privileged to see the waters of the Red Sea divide in front of them and then walk through the waters on dry ground. Paul says, "They were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." The word baptism means "washed." These people were washed with God's mercy and love that delivered them from the Egyptians and guided them with this amazing cloud of his presence. It also says that they ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink. Miraculously the Lord provided them with fresh water when Moses struck a rock. Every morning they were given fresh manna from heaven. Chia seeds and flax seeds are supposed to be healthy for you but they cannot compare to the quality of food God gave his people when he provided manna from heaven. They even had a rock that followed them and that was Christ. They knew about the Messiah who was to come who was the Rock of their salvation.

I am holding a rock in my hand with a cross on it. Wouldn't it be comforting if this rock developed a special glow whenever the Lord wanted to remind me of his presence? I have something better and so do you. Through God's Word we have come to see so clearly with our faith eyes God's deliverance at the cross of Jesus. We see Jesus not resisting the Roman soldiers as they were nailing him to the cross. He willingly allowed himself to suffer for us to pay for our sin. He allows us to see with the eyes of faith his body that was raised to life again. He allows us to see him sitting at the right hand of God and taking care of us. We are baptized into Christ. Everything Jesus has done for us comes to us through our faith and the blessing of our baptism. He even gives us very body and blood with the bread and wine. God's Old Testament people were truly blessed. Greater blessings have come to you through God's grace.

God was faithful to his Old Testament people, but they were unfaithful to him. "Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert." Many of these people never made it into the Promised Land. The book of Hebrews tells us they did not enter God's rest which means they even lost their place in God's grace and forgiveness because they rejected the Lord. Even today it is so very hard to see people slowly turn their back on Jesus and then slip away from him.

These people serve as a warning to us. We need to learn from history to not set our heart on evil things that can grow like some deadly virus and eventually destroy us. These people were guilty of the sin of idolatry. "Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; for it is written; 'The people sat down to eat and drink and go up to indulge in pagan revelry.'" Recall how Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive the commandments from the Lord. The people became discouraged. They melted down their gold to build an idol. They sat down to eat and drink in front of the idol they made. They got up to dance and play. There is nothing wrong with dancing and playing, but when it is done to the glory of an idol it results in rejecting the Lord.

Tim Keller, pastor from New York City, has written a book with the title, "Counterfeit Gods."

He says the Christian view of society needs to be different from the culture around us. He warns that we can get sucked into idolatry, especially the idols of sex, money and power. Sex, money and power can be great goods but they can also become false gods. He says, "If God is second place in your life and one of them is first, you are cooked." It is easy for Christians to develop blind spots when it comes to these idols. God's people were sucked into the worshipping the gods they had seen in the land of Egypt. They wanted to use the golden calf to enhance their worship of the Lord, to beef it up if you don't mind the pun. Any attempt to supplement our worship of the true God, will ultimately supplant the Lord and put him second in our lives.

"We should not commit sexual immorality as some of them did- and in one day twenty three thousand of them died." How did that many people die from sexual immorality? The wicked king of the Moabites hired a man named Baalim to curse God's people. When that didn't work Baalim offered something far more destructive. He told the king that he should send the most sensual young women of Moab to invite the young men of Israel to join in their sexual immorality as they worshipped their false gods. God sent a plague that destroyed 23,000 people. The people of Corinth lived in the most immoral city of ancient Greece. The dear Christians were constantly being challenged to embrace the immorality that surrounded them just as we are today. Even 21st pagans in Hollywood are aghast at the gross and pornographic movies highly featured and touted at the latest Sundance Film Festival.

And then there is the example of grumbling and complaining. "We should not test the Lord, as some of them did- and were killed by snakes." The people grumbled and complained because they had to take a detour around the land of Edom. Instead of crying out to the Lord for help with simple prayers such as "Lord help us" these people cried out to the Lord, "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!" The word for grumble is the Greek word that sound like what it means. When you listen to people grumble they make these grumbling and growling sounds under their breath. People cry out to the Lord in anger, "Why are you letting this happen to me? Don't you care about me? How different is the voice of our God who says to us, "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11)

All of these things were recorded for us on the pages of the Bible to serve as a warning for us. Don't say, "I could never be pulled away from the Lord by idolatry or adultery or grumbling and complaining. God's Word speaks to each of us this morning when it says, "So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall!" When you step into the hole of sin, you never know how deep that hole is or what is at the bottom of that hole. I recall talking to a Vietnam vet who described how frightened they were of walking through the jungle and falling into a disguised hole with sharpened bamboo sticks at the bottom. Sin is worse.

God is faithful

How can I even venture out of my house? Do I need to lock myself in my room to avoid temptation? If the Lord allows me to live on this earth how will I survive the temptations? Listen to the comfort the Lord gives us this morning. "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. 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 stand under it.”

God is faithful. He promised to send his Son to crush the devil’s power. He kept his Word. “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.” “Jesus was faithful in all of God’s house,” we are told in the book of Hebrews. He was tempted in all parts as we are, yet he was without sin. He was faithful. He willingly took the cup of suffering for our sin. Every step Jesus took while he lived on this earth shows how eager he was to fulfill the will of his Father in heaven and rescue us. The faithfulness of Jesus in rescuing me means that all my unfaithfulness of the past has been forgiven.

In the Lord’s Prayer we pray, “Let us not into temptation.” Jesus hears that prayer. Our heavenly Father hears that prayer. The Holy Spirit, our comforter also hears that prayer. Our God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. He will find a way for you to escape. Jesus knew exactly how much suffering was needed to pay for our sin. He also knows how to strengthen us. As we face another week of struggling with temptation, we do so with the confidence that our God is faithful. Amen.