

3rd Sunday in Lent

March 20, 2022

“God is faithful to keep you from falling” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today’s text for this 3rd Sunday in Lent is from the Epistle reading for today, 1 Corinthians 10:13

“13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

Here ends our text.

God is faithful Scripture says. As we just sang, “God changest not, Thy compassions they fail not, as Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.”

And we have many examples in the Bible of God’s faithfulness, long-suffering and forgiveness to His people. As we heard last week in our Gospel reading, God is pictured as a hen that invites His people to gather under His wings of salvation, protection and security. How many times Jesus lamented, how many examples of His faithfulness did He show His people, sending them prophets with His word and you would not.

Yes, even in the face of such rejection, for God’s grace is not irresistible, Jesus continues to Jerusalem, to the place where prophets die, so that He can show His faithfulness to remove all our sins by His suffering and death on the cross.

So Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:11-13,

“11 This is a faithful saying:

For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him.

12 If we endure, We shall also reign with Him.

If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

If we died with Him...how? Paul is recalling to us our baptisms as he said in Romans 6,

“4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

What remains the same, what is unchanging is God’s work for us in Christ. It is complete, perfect and God cannot deny this forgiveness to all who repent of their sins. This forgiveness is given to us through faith through our baptisms which washed us and freed us.

Yes, we are free! Yet, we are not freed, as long as we walk in this world of the temptations of our sinful flesh, the world and the devil. Against these we do battle constantly. This is common to all man, Paul says in our text. Don’t think that you have special temptations that others don’t have. We are battling the same evil.

And Paul himself doesn’t put himself over these temptations. For he says in the previous chapter of 1 Corinthians 9:27,

“Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. 27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”

Disqualified. That’s the danger that each of us must take seriously. For though God is faithful, we are often faithless. For though God does not deny Himself, His faithfulness, He must deny all who would deny Him. How I longed to gather you as chicks, but you would not and so you will stand outside the door knocking and grinding your teeth. So we heard last week.

Today’s epistle brings to us further examples of God’s faithfulness to our forefathers. Yes, Paul calls the children of Israel, our forefathers. These are our spiritual ancestors. Paul says that they serve a very important role to us, as examples – 40 years worth of examples. And most of it not so good, because only two, Joshua and Caleb entered the promised land.

We think about many of our ancestors who failed this morning, but also of God's faithfulness. Winston Churchill once said,

“Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”

Yes, in the secular kingdom of the left, God rewards and punishes those who heed or don't heed examples of history. How much unheeding continues to happen again in Ukraine?

And most of the Israelites, those over 20 years old were punished temporally by not being allowed to enter the promised land. Instead, they wandered in the desert 40 years, one year for each day that the spies spent checking out the promised land, its food and its people. After 40 days, 10 of the spies came back and said, we can't win against these people. They are like giants and we are like grasshoppers. Only Caleb and Joshua said, let's go we can do it with the Lord on our side. They entered the promised land.

Others died by snakes, or plagues, or being swallowed up by the earth. Their common sin was a lack of faith in God. They complained, followed false gods, made their own gods, led revolts against Moses. The result – their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. This was their temporal punishment of the kingdom of the left. Of course, though they all died in the desert, some died in the faith. With most of them, God was not well-pleased, Paul says, but some did receive the eternal promised land through faith in the Rock, Christ who followed them.

Yes, God is faithful. And we have much to learn from our spiritual ancestors. First, what not to do as we have already now heard, and second what they saw and experienced from God. For they always saw God's faithfulness to them. And this we can depend on in our 40 days, in our desert journey of the wilderness of this life. We have the same God of Israel on our side!

This is the God who rescued the Israelites from bondage and brought them out of Egypt. God has rescued us from the bondage and slavery of our sin and brought us into His kingdom of grace.

How has He done this? Well, the Israelites crossed the Red sea as God stood up the waters and were rescued from the Egyptians. Paul said they were baptized as they went through the sea. And certainly, we are rescued from all our spiritual enemies through our baptisms which cleanse us from all sin. We learn this was a foreshadow of God's faithfulness to us in our baptisms!

And the Israelites ate the food from heaven, the manna that fell from heaven. God daily provided for them. He is faithful. So also, we have been given a special food and drink from heaven. We eat the bread and receive this day, the very body of Christ and drink the wine and drink His very blood for our forgiveness. God is faithful to us, to His church as He continually gives us this sacrament to keep us strong in our earthly journey here.

“If we endure, We shall also reign with Him.”

“13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

God gives us the warnings and the means to remain faithful to Him. He will not allow the temptation to be stronger than what we can bear. Judas Iscariot’s temptation was not stronger than what he could bear. Jesus warned him at the supper and yet Judas rejected Christ’s warnings and betrayed the Lord. He suffers now in hell for his betrayal. His example also serves for us as one of those who did not reach the promised land.

So, we repent continually and humble ourselves before God who is faithful to us always! He is our Rock and salvation. He is the cloud by day and the fire by night who continually abides with us through His word and sacrament. Yes, we learn from history with Paul and the Corinthians to not repeat the mistakes, but to cling to God’s promises and His continual compassion and love for us in Christ.

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord your God.” (Numbers 15:41)

Yes, He is our God, the same God who has brought us out of our slavery to sin, helps us escape from the temptations of this life so that we may enter the promised land with Caleb, Joshua, Moses and all God’s people, our faithful ancestors. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)