

## 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea,<sup>2</sup> and they were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.<sup>3</sup> They all ate the same spiritual food<sup>4</sup> and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them—and that rock was Christ!<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them. He had them die in the wilderness.

<sup>6</sup>Now these things took place as examples to warn us not to desire evil things the way they did.<sup>7</sup> Do not become idolaters like some of them—as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to celebrate wildly.”<sup>8</sup> And let us not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell.<sup>9</sup> Let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and so were being destroyed by the serpents.<sup>10</sup> And do not grumble, as some of them grumbled, and were destroyed by the destroyer.<sup>11</sup> All these things that were happening to them had meaning as examples, and they were written down to warn us, to whom the end of the ages has come.

<sup>12</sup>So let him who thinks he stands be careful that he does not fall.<sup>13</sup> No testing has overtaken you except ordinary testing. But God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability, but when he tests you, he will also bring about the outcome that you are able to bear it.

## God is Faithful

### I.

Fathers of the faith. The phrase seems a little like the founding fathers of our country. What connection do you have, really, to these people of long ago? As a nation of immigrants, many family trees started their history in this country long after the founding fathers. As for the fathers of the faith, most of us aren't Jewish by heritage, so people like Abraham and Isaac aren't in our family tree, either.

“For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers...” (1 Corinthians 10:1, EHV). Corinth was a Greek city. It would stand to reason that most of the Corinthian Christians would not be able to trace their ancestry to the people of Israel who had come out of Egypt to make the journey to the Promised Land. They had no relationship to the people of Israel, yet Paul called them brothers, and referred to the people of Israel as “our fathers.”

As fellow Christians, the people of Corinth *could* trace their ancestry back to the same people led out of Egypt by Moses. As can we. Spiritually, we are connected.

“Our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea,<sup>2</sup> and they were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.<sup>3</sup> They all ate the same spiritual food<sup>4</sup> and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them—and that rock was Christ!” (1 Corinthians 10:1-4, EHV).

There are things to learn from history.

That group of people that came out of slavery in Egypt had some really great advantages. They had seen, first-hand, the evidence of the hand of God. In the cloud that led them by day and the pillar of fire by night, God was present with them in a very real way. To leave Egypt with all their worldly belongings and all their flocks and herds following after the pillar of God's presence must have been inspiring.

But then, with their backs against the Red Sea, Pharaoh's army was bearing down on them. There was no where to go. Moses, however, at the instruction of God, lifted up his staff, stretched out his hand over the sea, and the waters piled up in heaps on both sides so that the people could pass through on dry ground. As the people waited, that pillar of God's presence kept the Egyptian army from attacking. When all the people had passed through, the cloud moved and Pharaoh's army chased after the people. At the command of God, Moses again stretched out his hand, and

the waters came crashing back in on top of all who had followed, and they were drowned.

The miracles didn't stop. Manna came from heaven to be their food. God brought water out of a rock for them to drink. They did not starve to death or thirst to death during their whole time in the wilderness. Paul says that the rock that accompanied them was Christ himself.

If you saw miracle after miracle, if you experienced blessing after blessing directly from God's hand, wouldn't you be strong and solid in your faith? Wouldn't you follow without question the God who had done such great things for you?

## II.

They did not. Time after time those very people who had witnessed and experienced God's gracious hand in person turned aside.

"Do not become idolaters like some of them—as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to celebrate wildly'" (1 Corinthians 10:7, EHV). At God's command, Moses had gone up Mount Sinai to receive God's instructions about worship laws and the moral law. God also gave him the laws about how Israel was to be governed. It took some time. Moses was up on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights listening to the instruction of the Lord.

Did the people get bored waiting for Moses? Were they afraid he had died up there? "When the people saw that it took so long for Moses to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron and said to him, 'Get up, make a god for us, who will go before us, because this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt—we do not know what has become of him'" (Exodus 32:1, EHV). After the miracles they had witnessed in the plagues on Egypt, and the miracles at the Red Sea, waiting to cross, and watching Pharaoh's army drown, the people quickly forgot God's blessings. They were creatures of the moment. They wanted results. Now! Since Moses had taken so long to come down, they wanted a new god; one they could see and touch; one they could control; one whose timing fit *their* schedule, rather than them having to wait for God's own good time.

What Moses recorded in Exodus 32:6, Paul quoted exactly: "The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to celebrate wildly" (1 Corinthians 10:7, EHV). They traded in the true God for a false god.

"And let us not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell" (1 Corinthians 10:8, EHV). The worship of false gods was not confined to the Golden Calf. This time Paul referenced the time the people joined with the people of Moab in the worship of Baal, which included sexual immorality. God sent a plague on the people until there was mass repentance.

"Let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and so were being destroyed by the serpents" (1 Corinthians 10:9, EHV). If you remember your Bible history, you remember the bronze snake in the wilderness. The impatience and complaining of the people was nonstop. As Paul puts it, the people "put Christ to the test." They complained about the very food and water God had miraculously provided for them. The Bible doesn't say how many died from snakebite from that particular plague, just that many died (Numbers 21:6).

"And do not grumble, as some of them grumbled, and were destroyed by the destroyer" (1 Corinthians 10:10, EHV). Three men had led a movement to oppose Moses and Aaron. God responded by splitting the ground open and destroying them and their families. The next day, many Israelites grumbled that this had been unfair. More than 14,000 were destroyed (Numbers 16). The angel of death at the last plague in Egypt that destroyed all the firstborn of Egypt was also called the destroyer.

Why does Paul bring up so many things from the past? "All these things that were happening to them had meaning as examples, and they were written down to warn us, to whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Corinthians 10:11, EHV). The sins of the people of Israel from the past were not unique.

The sexual immorality surrounding the Golden Calf and the Baal worship were very similar to

the sexual sins of Corinth. It's not much of a stretch to see the casual attitudes about sexual behaviors today, and the way anything and everything is to be tolerated, and even praised, as the same kinds of sin against God.

It's not much of a stretch to see the same kind of grumbling and complaining against God by Christians today. God doesn't operate fast enough for our schedules. God doesn't intervene directly enough in the affairs of the world to suit our wants and desires. Christ is put to the test when we expect the blessings of God and don't recognize that they have come from his hands and when we refuse to appreciate the great things our God has done.

"So let him who thinks he stands be careful that he does not fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12, EHV). Maybe the people of Israel were overconfident. They had watched the blessings of God and thought that no matter what they did or said, God would forgive them. Perhaps they thought they could use the mercy of God as a license to sin. Overconfidence resulted in a fall from God's grace. They didn't take his warnings seriously, and thousands died in the wilderness.

Overconfidence is deadly. Overconfidence that you know everything there is to know about God and don't need to immerse yourself in his Word on a regular basis can quickly erode your faith.

### III.

"No testing has overtaken you except ordinary testing. But God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability, but when he tests you, he will also bring about the outcome that you are able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13, EHV).

The first Sunday in Lent we witnessed Jesus in the wilderness under intense temptation from Satan. The Second Reading for that day—which was the sermon text for the day—reminded us that Jesus endured temptation as our great High Priest, so he would be able to make the sacrifice God required for the sins of the world. On the cross, Jesus paid for every single sin in full.

"No testing has overtaken you except ordinary testing." Satan has limited imagination. When the circumstances of life seem overwhelming, look to Jesus. He experienced it. He conquered it. Remember that Jesus is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, because he has been through it all.

"God is faithful." Paul has just listed all kinds of failures of the people of Israel, our spiritual ancestors, in the wilderness. There were consequences to be faced for some of their unbelief, but God never stopped loving them. Manna from heaven kept coming, day after day, despite the faithlessness of the people. Life-sustaining water kept flowing, day after day, despite the faithlessness of the people. Through all their brazen acts of unbelief, God remained faithful.

"God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability." In other words, don't try to overcome the problems of the world and the temptations of the world alone. God knows your limits. He knows your abilities.

When you look back at things that were challenging in your past, you might be able to see how God used those things to prepare you for things you face now. God knows even the challenges you will face in the future. He sets limits on Satan. The devil will not be allowed to tempt you or to test you beyond your ability.

Not everyone makes use of God's way out. God gave the brass snake on the pole as a way to show their trust in God during the plague of snakes. Many looked and lived. Many refused to look in defiance, and died.

The way out is always there. God promises it. Use it. Always remember, God is faithful. Amen.