

Sermon Trinity 9 2021

August 1, 2021

I Corinthians 10:6-13

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Epistle Lesson, previously read.

If you know the letters that Paul writes to the Corinthians you know that within those we get a clear picture that the congregation in Corinth was a bit of a mess. In the first letter, you have these divisions within the congregation. People are aligning according to whomever it was that taught them the faith. So, you have those who are with Paul, then you have those who are with Cephas, that is Peter, then some follow Apollos; Apollos described in Acts 18 as being from Alexandria, so he was clearly well educated and probably an engaging and deep thinker. Then you have those who describe themselves as following Christ, you get the impression that they're trying to prove just how pious they are by that description. So, you start with that. Then you have issues with sexual immorality: a man is living as though married to his own stepmother. And there are problems with apparent charismatics who came in and wanted to teach everyone how to be really spiritual with speaking in tongues and things like that. And if all of that wasn't bad enough, there's this issue where they get together to have a meal and to have the Lords Supper in that meal, and it appears the wealthy have the luxury of getting there early, and those of a lower class have to work later and by the time those members of the church arrive the meal has been too long lasting and people are drunk. The church is a mess.

But in the midst of it, you get this theme that Paul comes back to a few times—or really sort of two themes together that he comes back to—that is misuse of freedom and idolatry. If you read in chapter eight Paul gets into this whole discussion about how people can feel free to eat meat. And we hear that and think it's a bit weird, because of course we can eat meat. God even told Noah to eat meat after the flood. But the issue here is that this is meat sacrificed in the temples of the Greeks. You see, apparently those temples would have dining halls attached and the meat from the sacrifices would be sold there, in a sort of marketplace. From reading, it sounds like the people could dine in or carryout. So Paul says, “you all know that these false gods are just that, they're nothing, so it shouldn't burden your consciences to eat, but if it makes someone think—someone especially like a new believer—if it makes them think that it's ok to worship those gods, or bothers them because of the attachment, don't do it! You are

free but don't cause someone to stumble in that freedom." And this comes back to this verse he's been saying throughout, "Everything is lawful for me." You see, apparently someone had come in and told these Corinthians that since Christ had freed them from the Law, they could do whatever they wanted. And so, they abused that freedom. And in that, you can see this connection to idolatry.

So, Paul tells them to watch out. And that's what we're hearing in our lesson today. Paul's telling them to watch out looking to the example of the Israelites in the desert. And as he warns them with these examples, right before the reading for today he says that God was not pleased with many of the Israelites. And he talks about four instances where the displeasure of God was seen. The first is the incident with the Golden Calf. I'm guessing most of you remember that, but it's when Moses was up on Mount Sinai receiving revelation from the Lord, and the Israelites fashioned a calf from gold that they would worship. This is right after God has told them not to worship other gods and not to worship created images. So, God was angry there. Then there's this issue of sexual immorality. That's from Numbers 25 where it says the Israelites began to whore with the daughters of Moab yoked themselves to Baal of Peor. Two comments on that, we tend to balk at that wording there, that's in part because of our cultural sensibilities. It's striking and it should strike us. Second is the connection you so often see with sexual immorality and idolatry. This is often because sexual rituals were a part of the worship for many tribes and religions. But it's such an interesting connection. As the people were sexually immoral in their bodies, they were unfaithful in their hearts toward God. In any case, that's the second. The Third is the incident with the fiery serpents. We had that one not too long ago, but to review, that's where the Israelites complained to Moses that they would rather have stayed in Egypt under slavery, and so the Lord sent the snakes that bit them. He then was instructed by God to fashion the bronze serpent that they looked upon to be healed. And last, there is the rebellion and grumbling where the Lord forgives the people through Moses, but says that none of them will enter into the Promised Land.

So, Paul tells them that they are to watch out that they don't fall into these temptations. He says, "**these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction.**" In other words, as there is this idolatry in this improper use of the freedom that God gives, as the people see all things as lawful, Paul says, "watch it." He says, "watch it, or you'll end up like the example of the Israelites. You will end up under the judgment of God." And that's a scary thought, isn't it?

That's where this should strike our hearts, isn't it? Be watchful of your faith and life that you don't fall under the judgment of God. Or like Paul said right before this, in the end of chapter nine, discipline yourself, your body, keep it under control, lest after all is said and done you be disqualified. Or as he puts it in this lesson, **"let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man."** He says, "if you don't think this is a concern for you, you better watch it. There is always this concern, this is the concern that all men should be cognizant of." And that concern is that a lack of watchfulness will lull them into a false security and they will suffer the judgment of God.

But he also gives comfort. So, yes, there is this temptation, there is this draw to lawlessness in the freedom we have in Christ, there is this pull into idolatry—which by the way as we think of idolatry in terms of the First Commandment to have no other gods, we have to realize that whenever we break any of the commandments, we have made whatever sin we have committed our idol, our god. To use Luther's phrase, we have feared, loved, or trusted that thing more than God, and so whenever we sin we commit idolatry, but there is this pull to it. But there is comfort. **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.**

Now as I say that verse, I do want to make a connection. Many people will say that God will not give you more than you can handle. That's not true. He gives you the demands of the Law that are more than you can handle. You can't keep them. You should be able to, but because of your sin you can't. But He is gracious in Christ, and He sent Christ to forgive all of those sins that He would do for you what you are unable to do for yourself. That's the beauty of the Gospel. But when it comes to temptation, He'll make sure you aren't tempted more than what you can withstand. And as He does that, He'll provide a way for you to have an out, or a way to be strengthened in His care.

Now as I say that, sometimes that way out is just an opportunity out of a particular circumstance. But other times it's just a strengthening of our will. But as I say that, where does He promise to strengthen us always? In His Word. In His Holy Supper. When you are wrestling, He promises that He is with you, He comes to you in that Word, He comes to you in that body and blood, and He provides strength for you there. Where is that strength? It's in His forgiveness. As you are forgiven, that makes you holy. It draws you into His holiness that gives you new life, and new realization of dependence on Him, realization that your strength in temptation isn't just in this pure

capacity of your will. It's not just in trying that hard not to do whatever. No, it's not like that. It's redirecting from your own effort to trust in His strength and care for you, and His ability to do all things. It's in looking at this Christ who is with you in Word and Sacrament, and knowing that He carries you because He is the One who loved you enough to lay down His life for you and to free you from sadness and sorrow, temptation to false worship, sexual immorality, testing Him, and grumbling against Him. That's where your comfort is.

And as I mention that, in particular the Lord's Supper, it's interesting because as Paul talks about this way out, he moves right from this conversation to the Lord's Supper. Now to be clear, he makes the point that because we partake of the Lord's Supper, we have this fellowship in this altar so that we don't partake of other altars. In other words, as we have this meal at the altar with Jesus as host and meal, we are joined together there, and don't want to join that with what is idolatrous. I've made that point, but that's a part of closed communion. We are confessing a unity here, a unity around the Gospel of Jesus' death for the forgiveness of sins that is received by faith and that is the only way to get to heaven. But it's also around the confession that Jesus truly is here with us, in with and under the bread and wine of the supper. As Paul says that bread we eat is a participation in the body of Christ. So, there's that, which is important because of the talk about idolatry there.

But I think you can't help make the connection to that being the way out in a sense. As you struggle with temptation, there is your way: in Jesus' gift to you in His body and blood. You are tempted to idolatry, to sin, to misusing your freedom, you are tempted to all of the things of the Corinthians, sexual immorality, divisions, trying to appear super spiritual, and Jesus says, "stop." He says, "Come to me, find rest. Here I am, the One crucified for your forgiveness, life, and salvation. Here I am in this cup and in this bread. Here you find me, I promise it. And in that promise you have strength and assurance and comfort. Come to me and I will give you rest." And as we are mess just like the Corinthians, that is comfort that we need always, and comfort that will carry us into and for all eternity. Amen.