

The Third Sunday in Lent

March 3, 2013

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

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. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. 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." We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did--and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did--and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did--and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 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. (NIV)

A husband and wife got a late start for a three hour drive home one night after attending a wedding. As they talked about the wonderful evening, she began to drift off to sleep. Suddenly, there was a terrible bump and weaving of the car. The wife thought they were in an accident, but kept her eyes closed out of fear. Feeling the same shaking, then nothing more, she opened her eyes and realized they were in the middle of the divided highway, still speeding along on cruise control. Finally, her husband, always composed, shut off the cruise control and steered the car back up onto the interstate. A couple of miles down the road the wife asked, "Did you fall asleep?" "Yes," her husband nodded. "Do you want me to drive?" "No," he said with his usual composure. "I'm wide awake now!"

Are we ever on cruise control, nearly asleep, when it comes to our Christians lives? Have we seen others fall into certain sins or even from faith, yet think that will never be me? Do we ever go down the dangerous road of taking God's Word for granted or His grace lightly? Do we ever have a sense of overconfidence in ourselves? Wake up! That's the message Paul has for the church in Corinth. Wake up! That is the message God has for us. Paul's words before us have a similar ring to our Savior's words in Gethsemane when Jesus told His disciples: "**Watch and pray, so that you will not fall into temptation.**" We too are reminded this morning that even when our spirits may be willing our flesh all too often is weak. So listen as we hear the call to: **Wake Up!**

The church in Corinth was richly blessed. Paul spent a year and a half there establishing perhaps his largest mission congregation. They heard and believed in the gospel of Christ crucified and risen. They rejoiced in the good news of forgiveness. They had been touched by God's grace. Yet, this church is not without problems. There

were clichés, sins of sexual immorality, and unloving lawsuits just to name a few if the issues troubling this congregation. But because they were Christians their sinful pride told some of them they were okay. After all, they had the truth. They were God's people - even Paul told them they lacked no spiritual gift from Jesus. Why, when it came to their faith, did they have to be concerned about anything?

I remember every history teacher I ever had at one time or another saying something like: **“Those that do not know their history are destined to repeat it.”** Paul gives the Corinthians a history lesson. He wants us to look at the past and take warning from it. Learn from it. He says: **“I do not want you to be ignorant, bothers.”** Take Israel for an example. The first thing Paul reminds us about Israel is how much they were blessed by God's grace. These words take us back to God sending them Moses and delivering them through the Red Sea. They remind us of the pillar of cloud that led them by day and pillar of fire that led them by night. These words speak about how God miraculously sustained them in the desert with food and drink. Most important they had Christ accompanying them! The Israelites had the promise of the Savior, and a God who provided for, protected, and led them into the land He promised. These were God's people. No one can question this or how God richly blessed them.

“Nevertheless, Paul writes, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.” Despite all that God in His grace had done for them many of His chosen people ended up falling away, rebelling, and being scattered over the desert. I am not going to go over each example here but would encourage you to go back and look at each of these Old Testament examples and see how the Israelites sinned and how God's judgment came in each instance. What I will tell you about these examples is how eerily similar these examples are to some of the same sins taking place in Corinth. Paul wants them to study the history of Israel and wake up! Paul is saying to the Christians in Corinth that if these awful things can happen to the people of Israel, what makes you think they can't happen to you? Paul writes that these things occurred as examples **“to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.”** He tells them: **“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us.”**

As the Israelites were blessed, and the Christians in Corinth were blessed, so too we are blessed by God's grace. Many of us have been baptized into Christ as infants. Some of us were blessed with parents who have taught us about Jesus before we even knew our ABCs. We have been privileged to have Jesus accompany us all the way! We are blessed to be a part of a Church body that teaches God's truth and keeps holding before our eyes the gospel of Christ crucified and risen. We understand that we have God's grace and forgiveness every day. So do we think we are standing firm? Do we have a bit of the same attitude, like some did in Corinth, that when it comes to our faith why should we be concerned about anything? Do we shake our heads at the Israelites and wonder how they could be so dumb? Do we read 1 Corinthians and think now there is a church with problems? Even if we don't say this out loud don't our sinful actions reveal these things in us? When we flirt with the same sins they did. *“A little drunkenness, a bit sexual immorality, some greed & envy, a lie here or there isn't going to kill me.”* When we start to think of our faith being strong enough and dismiss the strength of Satan isn't our sinful pride getting the best of us? *“A few weeks away from*

church and I won't miss anything. What do I need Bible study for or to take time at home to meditate on the Word? I know my Savior. I've been God's child since I was young."

"So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" When you think you are standing firm the devil has you right where he wants you. Wake up! Be careful and look at the warnings God has given to us in His Word. Is our flesh any stronger than King David's, who fell into adultery and murder? Is our pride any less dangerous than Peter's? Peter who said to Jesus, ***"Even, if all fall away, I will not."*** ***"I will lay down my life for you,"*** only to deny his Lord three times just a few hours later. Are we any less likely to give Satan a foothold than Judas who because of his greed betrayed his Lord and lost his life? Do we think we are better or stronger than these people who were Jesus' very own disciples? If so, wake up! Repent! See your own sins and stop trusting in your own weak sinful self.

God not only wants us to wake up and see the warnings from the past, but He also wants us to wake up and see something else. He wants us to see again the greatness of His grace. ***"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."*** Before we throw our hands up into the air and say our flesh is too weak and the devil is too powerful God reminds us the temptations we face are nothing new. They are the same ones common to people of the past. And God is faithful. I want to repeat this simple yet astonishing truth again: God is faithful. As we look at the history of unfaithful people throughout the Bible this is what we always find – a faithful God. What a beautiful, amazing, terrific promise we have here from our faithful God! God will never give us more than we can handle. With God our load will never be too much to carry. For God promises no matter what the temptation, no matter what the test, no matter what the trial, He will provide a way we can stand up under it. God provides the strength. He provides a way out. This includes from our own sinful pride and all sin.

For the season of Lent ends all questions and removes every doubt about God's faithfulness. Jesus, As God promised, becomes the Lord our righteousness, and suffers and dies on the cross as an all sufficient sacrifice for sin. Jesus is the reason God could call King David to repentance and forgive all his sins. Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection is the reason God could gently restore a broken down and heartbroken apostle Peter, forgive his denials, and call him to ***"Feed his sheep."*** Jesus is the reason the apostle John is able to remind sinners like us of God's faithfulness as he writes: ***"The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin...If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"*** (1 John 1).

What an eye-opening lesson for us today! I pray we never feel we can put our Christian lives on cruise control. I pray we never feel like we can stop learning, stop listening, stop receiving the strength His Word and Sacrament provide for us. I pray we take warning from the past and never take God's grace lightly! When we start to I pray we wake up! Then I also pray we wake up to see God is faithful. Every time we are forgiven, it is our faithful God who forgives us. Every time we do right, it is our faithful God who gives us the power. Every time we resist temptation, it is our faithful God who provides the way out. It is no wonder that Paul said: ***"When I am weak, then I am strong."*** Amen.

