

Text: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Theme: A Life Preserver

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation this morning is the Epistle Lesson from Saint Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, the tenth chapter verses one through thirteen.

Boys and girls how are you doing this morning? I pray that you are doing well. How good of a swimmer are you? Could you swim for hours and hours? Maybe? or would you need help? You might need what's called a life preserver. It is something that you can hold onto when you get tired of swimming and will hold you afloat so you will not drown. Two friends were on a vacation cruise when both fell overboard. The alarm was sounded. The rescue plan was set in motion. A life preserver was thrown to each person. One was relieved, grasped the preserver immediately, and was saved. The other believed he could do better on his own, pushed the preserver away, and was lost. Which of these are you? And if you are the one hanging on to the preserver, will you keep hanging on until you are safely pulled up onto the ship? Or is there the temptation to let go? How do we hold onto our life preserver given to us in and through Jesus Christ? Ponder these questions as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

Israel

In our text for today, Saint Paul draws on the history of Israel and uses it as an example of how people who have seen great things still need to be careful that they do not lose the thing that they have been given.

The Israelites saw great and wonderful things. They were a privileged group of people. Graciously saved by God from slavery to the Egyptians. By God's grace they saw and were a part of things that no people before or since has seen or been a part of. Whose else but Israel had seen the Lord of the universe blazing a trail for them through the wilderness with a pillar of cloud in the daytime and a pillar of fire at night? Who else but Israel had walked through the center of the Red Sea on dry ground with the water stacked up on both sides? Every Israelites who went through that dramatic baptism had a reason to think: "I must be one of God's people. Look at what great thing He is doing for me!"

They were certainly a privileged people. God Himself was their ruler, shepherd, and guide. Every year, the Israelites were to recall that saving event, called the Passover. That reminder sustained and preserved the new life that they had been given, that new freedom from slavery and oppression.

Christ Himself was present with them in the rock that provided water and in the manna from heaven. Daily, they were provided for by God Himself. They daily saw the wondrous things of God for their good. Even those wondrous signs that they daily saw, they rejected. They fell into idolatry, sin, and eternal death. However, those who did not reject the rock, those who held into the promises of God, were saved through their faith. Out of all of the original Israelites who walked through the Red Sea, 600,000 plus

men twenty years and older, there was only two, Faithful Joshua and Caleb, who entered the Promised Land.

Corinthians

If people as privileged as Israel could fall away from their God, what warning for us! Paul takes this history of Israel and applies it to the case of the Corinthian Church. Just as the people of Israel, the church in Corinth have graciously saved by God from bondage to the pagan idols. They are no longer slaves to false gods of wood, stone, and lustful passions.

They too have seen the gracious works of God for them in and through Jesus Christ. Their reaction? One bordering on arrogance leading to eternal damnation. They took the mercy of God for granted, thinking that they could go back to their old ways and be fine. Rather, than being separated from former ways of ungodly living, they returned to it! Saint Paul warns them against this using the history of Israel. He says, ‘do not be idolaters as some of them were... We must not indulge in sexual immorality... we must not put Christ to the test.’ Why? Because Baptism into Christ meant a new way of life. It means putting away forever former things. No longer going after sinful ways, but resisting them by standing firm in Christ Jesus. They must be on guard and take heed lest they fall. Recalling their Baptism and salvation in Christ (including the Lord’s Supper, as Paul will explain later), they are sustained and preserved that new life that is granted to them.

Where the Word and Sacraments are, there Christ is present. He accompanied the Corinthians, just as He did ancient Israel. Because Christ is with them, they are provided the way out of sinful dangers. They depend, not

upon themselves and their own strength, but upon Christ's death and resurrection for them. They do not become arrogant and prideful, thinking that they can sin and do whatever they want. If they do that, then they are rejecting Christ and are lost. Those grasping him through faith are saved. It means repenting of their sins, again and again, living in the forgiveness of Christ.

Illustration: Sinful behaviors can box us in and make us feel constrained and unable to escape. Following Jesus is like discovering a passageway out of those behaviors.

US

The same case can be made with us. We have been graciously saved by God from compulsion to embrace our pagan culture. We have seen the great signs and wonders that God has done on our behalf, by sending His only Son, to suffer, bleed and die for you and me. We can not become arrogant. We have the same weaknesses as Israel and Corinth.

Christ, our leader, the Son of God, has mercy upon you by sending pastors as his undershepherds. It is the responsibility of a pastor to forgive you of your sins in the name and stead of Christ. To remind you of the new life given to you in your baptism. To help you and strengthen you by the Gospel to live out that new life given to you in Christ. Living out this new life is not an easy task, we are daily tempted, we daily struggle.

Yet, remembering what Jesus has done for us. That He has taken away all of our sins and removed them from us. That He has given to us new life by His resurrection, we are strengthened. The same as Israel of Old and the church in Corinth, we too have Christ present with and for us. Christ

is present in the apostolic Scriptures. He gives us His very body and blood in, with, and under, the bread and the wine of the blessed Eucharist. These accompany us as we live out our lives, strengthening, and empowering us.

Christ's presence provides the way out of sins that continue to tempt us and threaten us with death. When we are tempted, we remember His temptation, and His suffering for us, we do not take it lightly. Rather, we hold it close and highly. Reminding each other, "Christ died for you. This is no small thing to take lightly. By His resurrection, He has given to you newness of life. Live in Him. Resist sin, hold fast to Christ."

Illustration: Luther recommends that one's first words on rising and retiring for the evening be the trinitarian invocation, thus reminding us of our Baptism. Then he suggests praying his morning and evening prayers.

The Christian life is like a journey on a ship. From time to time, for a variety of reasons, we each find ourselves thrown overboard, swimming in a sea of temptations. We cannot swim long on our own. We need something to hold on to for our salvation. Continue to hold onto Jesus. Hold onto your Baptism into his name. Baptism into Christ is our life preserver. Grasp him and hold him tight, even when the seas roar and foam, dear Christian hold tight. Your Savior is present with you, hold fast to Him.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.