

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Third Sunday in Lent

March 20, 2022

Psalm 85:1–13 (ESV):

1 LORD, you were favorable to your land;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

2 You forgave the iniquity of your people;
you covered all their sin. Selah

3 You withdrew all your wrath;
you turned from your hot anger.

4 Restore us again, O God of our salvation,
and put away your indignation toward us!

5 Will you be angry with us forever?
Will you prolong your anger to all generations?

6 Will you not revive us again,
that your people may rejoice in you?

7 Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,
and grant us your salvation.

8 Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints;
but let them not turn back to folly.

9 Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,
that glory may dwell in our land.

10 Steadfast love and faithfulness meet;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.

11 Faithfulness springs up from the ground,
and righteousness looks down from the sky.

12 Yes, the LORD will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.

13 Righteousness will go before him
and make his footsteps a way.

1st Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 33:7–20 (ESV):

7 “So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. 8 If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. 9 But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.

Why Will You Die, Israel?

10 “And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: ‘Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?’ 11 Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

12 “And you, son of man, say to your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall by it when he turns from his wickedness, and the righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness when he sins. 13 Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die. 14 Again, though I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just and right, 15 if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, not doing injustice, he shall surely live; he shall not die. 16 None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he shall surely live.

17 “Yet your people say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just,’ when it is their own way that is not just. 18 When the righteous turns from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it. 19 And when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is just and

right, he shall live by this. 20 Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways."

EPISTLE: 1 Corinthians 10:1–13 (ESV):

Warning Against Idolatry

10 For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 and all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

6 Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." 8 We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9 We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, 10 nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. 12 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. 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.

Gospel: Luke 13:1–9 (ESV):

Repent or Perish

13 There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. **2** And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? **3** No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. **4** Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that

they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? **5** No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

6 And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. **7** And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ **8** And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. **9** Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’ ”

Sermon 12 – Third Sunday in Lent

“Temptation Train”

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Dear friends,

St. Paul in our epistle lesson has a relatively simple point to make, but he makes this point using several examples very offhandedly from the Old Testament. This is one of those passages that seems more complicated than it actually is because of that, so we're going to try to cut down a little of what Paul says, explain a little of what Paul says, and then try to come to some sort of conclusion based on what Paul says. His point is this: Do not desire evil, desire to do good instead. He urges the Corinthians to look at the Exodus story in particular for what happens what you don't fight your own sinful desires. All Christians are caught in a war with ourselves and with what we want, so these are good words for us too.

Paul is in the center of his letter to the Corinthians here, and that audience, the Corinthians, explains why he feels like he has to say these things. The Christians in Corinth struggled with immorality, public, often times rather disgusting immorality, in a way that not too many other churches in Paul's letters seemed to struggle. We know the Ephesians and the Colossians had problems but those problems were different. Corinth was again a

port city, the Las Vegas of its time, it was high-energy, high crime, high problems. The gleaming temptations of going to town are hard to ignore for any red-blooded sinner among us, and the Corinthians had been living this way for most of their lives probably before Paul brought the Christian faith to them. He wrote four letters to the Corinthians, and we only have two, and those two can be harsh sometimes as he reminds them of what being Christian means.

And that's fine, that's easy to understand. The life of the party can lead to a lot of wicked behavior, and Christians aren't supposed to do that, we get it. But its how Paul chooses to say that makes it kind of dense and hard to understand. **“For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 and all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink.”** All these are a reference to the Exodus story. Remember that God in Exodus led the people of Israel by a pillar of cloud by day, that's what he means when he talks about the cloud. They passed through the Red Sea, which Paul calls a baptism of sorts, and the spiritual food and the spiritual drink are references to the miraculous way that God fed them in the desert, the manna in the wilderness and the water that God produced from a miracle rock. So why is Paul saying this? He is reminding the Corinthians that their forefathers had all kinds of miracles and signs and real, tangible proof of God's presence. They'd watched the Ten Plagues happen, crossed the Red Sea, God was literally leading them in a cloud and feeding them miracle food. They had all that, but they still strayed. They were still led into sin by temptation and by unbelief. If you're like me, this is really difficult to believe. Deep down, I think that if I were to actually see the Ten Plagues happening, to actually physically follow God out of Egypt, I would never ever doubt God again. I would never be tempted to sin again, because I had just seen this God in an incredibly special and real way. Paul tells the Corinthians, hey, they had all those miracles. They saw all these amazing things. And they still fell. They still sinned. You, therefore, need to be careful. **“5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.”** What overthrew the Israelites in the wilderness? Their own sin did. Their own sinful hearts

led them astray and made them lust after things and people they had no business wanting. They couldn't be satisfied with what God had to offer, they always needed more. Eventually, they took to getting more in sinful ways, and that was the death of them.

“6 Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” Paul makes it very clear that we should learn from the sins of our fathers and mothers, those in the Bible, and those around us, and not get too cocky about our chances. Think of your sin as a predator living inside you, and when you feed that predator, it gets bigger and stronger. The more you feed it, the bigger it gets, the harder to control. Eventually, Paul warns us, that predator will eat us and become us. This is why the Law is still important for us Christians. Yes, Christ did it perfectly, we never can, but we still discipline ourselves to follow those Ten Commandments to prevent sin from getting any more hold on us than it already has. This can be a physical thing, changing a habit or starving an addiction, or it can be a mental thing, changing how think about the people we dislike, how we react to those who have sinned against us. Either way, this daily discipline of resisting our sinful desires is an important one for Christians to exercise. Paul starts with idolatry, and idolatry starts with me and what I want. So watch your me and what you want, always be willing to second-guess yourself and use what the Bible says to determine if what you want is actually good for you.

I realize you folks are long familiar with this, and that what you want is usually pretty virtuous or just bland. I'd like a nice sunny day, there you go, nothing particularly sinful about that. This is one of those lines that is hard to practically draw. God doesn't want you endlessly beating yourself up about your sins, because your sins are forgiven. At the same time, God still wants you to know that your sins are bad for you, and that they should be fought and resisted. There's a line to walk there, and set yourself out to walk that line.

Paul gives a few more examples, sexual immorality is an especially gross kind of sin but one we're all familiar with the seduction of. Putting Christ to the test could mean a

bunch of different things. Don't mock God, don't test His patience, don't assume that He's not watching kind of thing. Grumbling is a hard one to follow up on. Everyone grumbles, and grumbling against God is one of those ways that you might start to take on some of these worse sins. **“11 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. 12 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”** The end of the ages rests on you, Paul says. That sounds like an awfully heavy burden, but remember we don't know when Christ will return. The world could end any day now, so we're always at the end. You who stand in Christ, you Christian people who have faith, be cautious. Take heed. Pay attention to yourself, your choices, your desires, your goals. You don't want to fall as they did. Learn from the people in the Holy Scriptures, because they had the same goals and desires you do, and they suffered from the same temptations you do. Learn from those older and wiser in the faith, they can tell you how to change or sidestep some of those temptations.

“13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. 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.” Christ has given you forgiveness, but He has also given you a new heart and a new self. So when your old self tempts you to sin, you can refuse it, that is within your power. We often don't, but Paul reminds us that God always gives us a way to refuse that temptation. For quick temptations this is easy, you just gotta make the choice when the moment comes. For long-term temptations this becomes an art, and I can personally assure you that God is ready to school you in that art. God will assist you when you feel tempted by something and it won't go away. Sometimes you'll fall, sometimes you'll succeed, but God will use both those successes and those falls to make you stronger against it. What we want is for the temptation to go away. Sometimes God does that. Sometimes He doesn't. What He will do is use that temptation to train you, to make you purer, more holy, more wise. It won't feel that way. It'll feel like a knife in your soul that won't go away, an endless nagging hunger that you can never satisfy. Through those difficulties, though, Christ is

guiding you like a shepherd guides His sheep. He is urging you on, like a father teaching a toddler to walk even though he falls. You may never see progress, but Christ promises you all this is progressing you, all of you, toward the holiness that He has prepared for you in the next life.

You'll get better. You're already getting better even as you hear this. You may not see it but its there, Christ sees it, and He calls it like He sees it.

Amen.