

1 Corinthians 10:1-13
Third Sunday in Lent
March 20, 2022

Perhaps it's a sign of aging, but lessons from the past pop into my mind. From the early years of schooling I recall what we were told about crossing streets. "Stop, look and listen." I think that also sums up today's Second Lesson. So we consider

STOP, LOOK AND LISTEN

- I. To learn from the past
- II. To avoid complacency
- III. For help from God

As St. Paul calls on us to stop, look and listen to learn from the past we come to appreciate the blessings God has granted. He provided a summary of special favors he had granted to his Old Testament people. He noted they were under the cloud. A pillar of cloud had led the Israelites on their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. At night it became a pillar of fire. It was a sign of God's presence and reassurance of his care and leadership. He would be with them every step of the way.

There was an exception to the pattern and that was when "they all passed through the sea." The Egyptian pharaoh had again changed his mind and decided the nation shouldn't be allowed to leave. He pursued with his army. Then the cloud moved behind the Israelites and protected them through the night. Moses raised his staff and stretched his hand over the Red Sea. The Lord divided the waters and dried a route for his people to cross. When they were safely over and the Egyptian army pursued he closed the water route and drowned them. The threat was gone.

Paul referred to that event as being baptized into Moses. Unlike our baptism, water did not touch them. But there are similarities between our baptism and the exodus. It was all God's doing. He made it happen, sending the plagues in Egypt and finally the Passover death of the firstborn that convinced the pharaoh to allow their departure. He brought their freedom from slavery. They were allowed to leave and be separate from the world around as God's people. They were connected with their leader Moses and encouraged to faithful following. In the same way, our baptism is God's doing. We don't prepare ourselves for it, especially when you think of our practice of infant baptism. Baptism delivered us from the slavery to sin. It calls us out of the world to be God's people and attaches us to Christ to follow him in faith to our Promised Land of heaven.

The Apostle also noted the forefathers had partaken of the same spiritual food. Manna and quail were the physical provision that sustained the nation during their journey. There was a spiritual aspect to them. God taught them to trust him daily as a greedy grabbing of an extra amount of manna left them with a rotting mess and maggots. The regular provision assured them of the Lord's help as they went forward through territory that could not sustain a nation with natural resources. They also received spiritual drink. A commodity scarce in a desert is water. God provided it from a rock more than once and turned bitter water drinkable. Again, it did more than quench their thirst. It fed their faith that God would continue to meet their needs. There was other care as well. He made sure their clothes and sandals did not wear out. He gave them victory over opposing armies even though they were not a military force.

The real source of blessing was not a physical rock but "that rock was Christ." He was the giver of all the good they enjoyed. I said we could learn from the past. God does not change so we know that he continues to supply good things for us.

As we look to the past we have another lesson to learn. Be warned by the sins and sinners of history. "Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert." Understand the extent and impact of that statement. God had ordered a census of the men age twenty and older. Those were the ones eligible for fighting. The recorded number totals 603,550. Only two of that number entered Canaan at the end of their forty-year journey (Joshua and Caleb, the pair of faithful spies who had urged the nation to enter, confident of God's help, when they first came to the border). That means 603,548 bodies of adult men plus a sizable number of women and maybe some children were buried along the way. The Sinai Peninsula was a vast burial ground.

The reason for God's displeasure was their disobedience. Paul cited some examples. They became idolaters, worshiping the golden calf even while Moses was on the mountain receiving the written law from the Lord. They were guilty of sexual immorality, which was involved in the pagan rituals. That licentiousness was always an attraction to Israel with the moral code of purity which God had given them. Twenty-three thousand of them died on a single day after a combined time of idolatry and sex with Moabite women. They repeatedly put God to the test with their grumbling. One time when they complained about the leaders God had given them, the ground swallowed up many and fire consumed others.

We need to learn from the past. There is truth to the saying that those who ignore history are bound to repeat it. Be encouraged by God's blessings and warned

against human folly. We are on a journey through life. It is filled with temptations but also with God's goodness. Note that Paul referred to those Israelite experiences as "our forefathers." The Corinthians were not descended from them nor most of us, but we are a spiritual family as we share a common faith. Corinth offered a wide open society with loose morals, wrong goals and complaint but yet a gracious God. Sound familiar?

II.

That last reference to grace should cause us to stop, look and listen to avoid complacency. We can misuse history. Receipt of past blessings could lead some to think they are privileged and deserve them. That thought brings to mind last Sunday and the opponents of Jeremiah who thought the temple could never be destroyed. The danger of a good life is that we begin to think it is owed to us and must continue. Pride in one's own goodness starts surfacing, which is self-worship. Grumbling also occurs if the same high level of gifts is not there.

We might also take our blessings for granted. We don't appreciate them and thank the source. In the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught us to pray for daily bread. Remember even the small and ordinary things God has supplied. They are still his gifts and undeserved by us.

Another way complacency shows up is in thinking we are great and invincible. We need the warning of the text. "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" Soon enough, something comes along and knocks your feet out from under you. That might do more than teach a needed lesson in humility. We might despair and lose hope completely, no longer trusting in God. Satan has that as his goal. Never think it couldn't happen to you.

Sin can be taken for granted also. Paul spoke of our temptations being "common to man." We could start to think if it is natural it must be OK. Unfortunately, yes, it is all too natural. All of us are plagued with a sinful nature and do sinful things. But bad behavior is still wrong. "Everybody's doing it," is not a valid excuse nor a reason for acceptance of sinful ways. We also can't use the strength of our temptations as a reason for pity, that we have it worse than everyone else. We all deal with temptation and need to look to God for the strength to resist.

Stop, look and listen to God's law. See and confess your sins. Listen to the gospel and receive the forgiveness Jesus won for you on the cross. Then you won't feel complacent about sin or think you deserve only good from God.

III.

Sin comes from temptation and to deal with it, stop, look and listen for help from God. A big part of his help is that he sets limits. "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear." The Lord is not the source of our temptations; Satan and his helpers have dedicated themselves to bombarding us with them. But they are not in complete control. Recall Job. Before attacking his faith the devil came to God and asked permission. First he was told he could not touch the man's body. When that didn't work to produce a fall from faith the devil came again to God and was told he could not take his life. Or as you will hear in an upcoming Wednesday Lenten service, Jesus told Peter and the other disciples that Satan had asked to sift them as wheat. Again we see that God is in charge.

God knows our limits and does not let them be exceeded. We might object, "Then why do we blow it so often?" It's not supposed to be us facing the devil alone. Then we would surely lose every time. The Bible compares him with a lion, "a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." When God sets the limit, it is the limit of what he will enable us to bear as we use the power of his Word. Remember that he is almighty and so is his Word. Get to know it well. Wield it as the sword of the Spirit. Then "you can stand up under it."

God also gives relief. "When you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." One way is to grant you successful resistance to Satan's ploys. He can remove the temptation and send Satan away. He enables endurance.

The ultimate way out is when he takes you to heaven, where there will be no temptation. Doesn't that prospect make you long for your eternal home? What joy awaits!

Because we often fail in defeating temptation, we are thankful that Jesus won the victory for us. He did not just overcome temptation but he also paid for our failings to do so. What a relief! His work for us prompts us to get up and fight, using the power supplied to us in Word and sacrament and winning with Christ.

So stop. Stop listening to Satan's siren call. Stop and consider what he has done. Look at the Savior and listen to his Word, both the law and the gospel, the first identifying your sin and the latter telling of your Savior. Follow him in battle and win with him.