

Ninth Sunday after Trinity: August 14, 2022
“Hope in The Unchanging God”

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

The Holy Spirit tells us through St. Paul, “*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 types of us, for us not to be desirers of evil, just as also they desired. ⁷ Neither be idolaters, just as some of them.*”¹

At first glance, one might be tempted to only read Law within these passages; and in the immediate context, that would be correct. Read in the entire context of the Scriptures however, these words bring forth one of God’s most comforting qualities; He is immutable. He does not change. He is not an arbitrary God who works in haphazard or illogical ways. He is not a capricious or unpredictable God who is fickle or flighty like the gods fashioned by the human race. He does not bend to the will of man like the gods of Rome, Greece, Egypt, or America.

God is the same forever, from everlasting to everlasting.² That means when this God speaks, His Word too is forever, “*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.*”³ This is what gives us great comfort in reading through the Old Testament history of our ancestors in the faith. God has recorded for us a record of not just human history, but how He works in history, throughout history, for His people.

As we read through these holy pages, we learn God is the same forever. He does not change. People are different. They do change and not always for the better. Although people do change, we all remain members of the same human race; and we share a common condition. We are sinners, who have fallen short of the glory of God. As Paul recounts the history of Old Testament Israel, he joins them to the church in Corinth and to you, brothers and sisters in Christ, “*No temptation has come upon you that is not from man, and God is faithful.*”⁴

¹ 1 Corinthians 10:1–7

² Psalm 90:2

³ Isaiah 40:8

⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:13

So, although each of us suffers from our own particular temptations and sins, nothing that afflicts us is truly unique. Nothing's new under the sun. What tempts us; the sins into which we fall; they've tempted and caused to fall Christians before us. Again, this is why it is so important to read and become familiar with the Holy Scriptures. The Bible describes how our God, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever deals with his people, who are very much in the same spiritual situation as we are now. St. Paul says these things were written for our instruction or admonition. It then behooves us to read what was written and learn about ourselves.

St. Paul reminds us that our fathers in the faith, the people of Israel, were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, they all ate the same spiritual meat and drank the same spiritual drink, they drank from the spiritual rock, which followed them, which was the same Christ we worship today! They worshipped the same God. They followed the same Christ. Notice even the similarity to the Sacraments we have today. They were baptized into the cloud, which was the very presence of God and into the sea, just as we are baptized not only into water, but in the name of God.

They ate and drank spiritual meat and drink from Christ, just as we eat and drink the body and blood of the same Christ for spiritual sustenance. Yet, what does St. Paul say? ***“Nevertheless, with most of them God was displeased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.”***⁵

What does this teach us? It teaches us that Baptism and the Lord's Supper do not save us if we do not have faith! They are not magic tricks that simply work because of the action itself. The same Holy Spirit who worked through Moses says through Paul that they were all baptized! Yet, they were not all saved!

Now one is of course prompted to rightly and immediately ask, “Pastor, doesn't baptism save?” Yes, dear Christian. It does. It works the forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to...how does it end? **TO ALL WHO BELIEVE THIS.**⁶ Faith is needed. If you reject Christ, Baptism is of no benefit to you.

“But Pastor, what about the Lord's Supper?” Dear Christian, very much the same. In the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:5

⁶ Small Catechism, Baptism Part 2

How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things? Certainly not just eating and drinking, but the words written here: “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” These words, along with the bodily eating and drinking, are the main thing in the Sacrament. Whoever *BELIEVES* these words has exactly what they say: “forgiveness of sins.”⁷

St. Paul used the example of the children of Israel in the wilderness to warn the Christians in Corinth, and us, not to despise our Baptism and not to abuse the Lord’s Supper. From what we can read from 1 Corinthians, this is exactly what the Christians in Corinth were doing. They were living as if their bodies were not the temple of the Holy Spirit, who began His dwelling in them at their Baptism. They were giving a nod to baptism, but then living their lives as if their bodies were their own. They felt they had free license to do whatever they wanted with their own bodies, and no one could tell them what to do.

The Lord’s Supper was treated like a common dinner party. There was no regard for the holiness of the meal being celebrated. There were divisions by socio-economic class. It was seen as something that could be taken or left at any current gathering time, because, “Well, there will be another one.” Other gods vied for time and competed with the bonding together of God’s people. The people of Corinth were even going so far as to participate in pagan sacrifices in direct contradiction to the Communion into which they participated in the Sacrament.

These things are important for us to consider today as it was for the Corinthian Christians. Are we not prone to treat Baptism like a superstitious magic spell, which imparts salvation even if we don’t continue in the faith? “Get the child done.” is actually uttered by Christians in reference to bringing a child to the saving waters of Baptism! Yet, Baptism is not a once and done event. Baptism is placing a new-born Christian into the safety of the Christian Church to be nurtured and to grow in faith.

The Lord’s Supper is God’s food for the faithful, not for those who continue in sin without repentance, or for those who do not believe in Christ. We must not be idolaters as some of them were. Here St. Paul references Exodus chapter 32, where the children of Israel, impatient with Moses’ delay on top of Mount Sinai, worshipped a golden calf, crediting it for their deliverance from Egypt! God punished them for their idol worship.

⁷ Small Catechism, Lord’s Supper

The Corinthians likewise were tempted with idolatry. They lived in a culture that worshipped many false gods and Christians would often be pressured by social norms to participate in sacrifices to idols. They wanted to fit in, and even convinced themselves that a little bit is just fine, and it's easier to ask for forgiveness than for permission.

Do we not struggle with the same today? It may be uncommon in overt ways to be invited to eat meat sacrificed to idols. It still hangs around in certain circles in places where meals are served and one must stand up at a certain time and pray in certain directions, or meetings are held where prayers are offered to a universal "god" leaving it open to define god anyway one chooses.

What is more common is subtle idolatry. Idolatry is to fear, love or trust in anything above God. It is easy to trust in money more than God. It is easy to love our pleasures more than God. It is easy to fear rejection from our family and friends more than rejection from God.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, take heed of this idolatry. Your fathers were baptized into Moses and idolatry destroyed them. Do not let your idolatry throw away your Baptism. Do not let your idolatry remove trust from the everlasting, never-changing God to the fickle and ever-changing feelings, thoughts, or will of man.

What you do with the body, time, and resources God has given to you is important. Covetousness is rooted in idolatry and unbelief. It grumbles and complains in what it doesn't have and then turns its trust and hope away from God.

I know this has been Law-heavy, and hang in there, the Gospel is coming. For your strength in temptation and eternal comfort, there is one more point that needs mentioning.

Christians often think that keeping the faith is simply holding on to the basic doctrine of the Christian faith, and as long as you believe that there is one God and that Jesus died on the cross, then you won't lose your faith. This is known as mere historical faith: knowing the facts, but not truly trusting in God.

But Satan often doesn't attack the chief doctrine of our faith head on; rather, he tempts us into other sins. If he constantly attacked our faith in one God and in Jesus as our Savior, we would put up guards against him.

Satan prowls like a lion and attacks from the side. He entices us away from the faith by first drawing us into other sins. He won't tell you to deny God upfront, but rather to also love other gods like money and power and worldly acceptance. He won't deny that Jesus is Lord, but he'll still entice you into sexual immorality or simply to think that it really isn't a big deal.

Christians can be guilty of being the worst complainers and malcontents. They think they honor God, while not realizing that their complaints and grumbling about money, against their neighbor, against their boss, and so forth are really complaints against God, who provides for them and bids them to love their neighbor. This is why St. Paul warns, "***The one who believing he is standing, watch that he does not fall.***"⁸

Brothers and sisters in Christ, here is the Gospel. Don't take for granted your faith in Christ, but rather beware of temptations that destroy faith. Too often Christians think that they can remain Christians by their own strength, merit, and works. They become proud that they will always be Christians no matter what. But as Scripture shows us and as our own experience tells us, Christians can fall away.

How can you prevent yourself from falling? How can you endure temptation? Can anyone have certainty of salvation? To answer this, you must look away from yourself and to Christ Jesus. He is the way of escape from temptation. He is your refuge when your own sins assail you.

The reason so many of Israel fell in the wilderness is because they forgot Christ. They forgot the Promise of the Messiah. Their Baptism into the sea and their eating of spiritual food did them no good, because they did not look to Christ their Savior, their God. They trusted in themselves or something of this world; not in the promise of God or in God to keep His promise.

Can you have certainty of salvation? Yes! In Christ alone! The unchanging God became a man. He lived the perfect life. He was tempted in every way that you were; yet, He was faithful. He walked the way to the cross. He died for your sins. His blood is the propitiation for your transgressions. The Word who endures forever has declared it to be finished. It is not within yourself you find certainty. You find it in Christ and Him crucified. You know His death and victory over sin and death are yours because you can say with certainty in faith, "I am baptized into Christ."

⁸ 1 Corinthians 10:12

Jesus says, “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*”²⁸ *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*”⁹ They hear His voice through His Word. They gather around to gladly hear and learn it. His rod and staff comforts, that is His Word, His Law and Gospel, are comfort to the sheep. The sheep love to hear the idols, their idols, cast down from their thrones, because then they lie in green pastures beside still waters.

This promise is an eternally important one. It is Jesus, His forgiveness and salvation, which will strengthen you in temptation’s hour. It is Jesus who will restore you again when you come to him with a penitent heart.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God does not change. He “*is the same yesterday and today and forever.*”¹⁰ His promise of salvation in Christ cannot be voided or altered. The mercy He has shown to the saints in the Bible instructs us of this great truth. God forgave David, who committed adultery and murder. He forgave Peter, who denied Christ three times. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost.

When we look to Scripture, we see how God punishes those who reject Christ by falling away into sin; yet, also throughout Scripture we see a God who does not deal with us according to our sins, but according to His own mercy.¹¹

Thus we pray,

“I walk with Jesus all the way,
 His guidance never fails me;
 Within His wounds I find a stay
 When Satan’s pow’r assails me;
 And by His footsteps led,
 My path I safely tread.
 No evil leads my soul astray;
 I walk with Jesus all the way.”¹² Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

⁹ John 10:27–28

¹⁰ Hebrews 13:8

¹¹ Psalm 103:10

¹² I Walk in Danger All the Way LSB 716:5

Prayer of the Church
Ninth Sunday after Trinity
14 August 2022

Let us pray for the people God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their need: Merciful Father, You show mercy to us poor sinners. Lead us to acknowledge Your mercy with gratitude, that in turn we may be quick to show mercy to others. Give us a right understanding of our own weakness and frailty. Preserve us from pride, and lead us instead to cling to Christ and His forgiveness. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, by Your Holy Spirit help us always to be good and faithful stewards of all that You so graciously provide. Especially grant that we may generously speak of the salvation that You provide for all through Your Son. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, soften the hearts in every home. Turn parents and children toward each other in love and patience. Banish the spirit of impudence, stubbornness and rebellion from all. Sanctify us in Your truth. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, You save a humble people, but Your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down. Give true wisdom to the people of our nation and humility to those who act and decide for our governance, and let the lamp of Your perfect Word and way enlighten their faith and deeds. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Denise*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Sophia, Rylee, Joe, Dan, & Lucas* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the joy and blessings that You have granted *Kevin & Diane and Pastor & Markie* during the years of their marriage. Assist them always by Your grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards You and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that You have promised; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Faithful God, preserve those who are suffering temptation and any affliction of body, soul, possessions or reputation [*Marvin, Ruth, Pam, Zoey, Dorothy, John, David, Merrill, Greg, Pastor Small (St. Silas, North Liberty), and those we name in our hearts*]. Make clear to them the way of escape, that they may be able to endure it and stand firm through faith in Christ Jesus. Give patience in tribulation and restore the joy of Your salvation. Comfort the weeping with Your lovingkindness, and console the grieving with the hope of the resurrection. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give us a right fear of You, O Lord, that we would not abandon Your truth. Give us a right love of You, O Lord, that we would fervently show mercy and thereby cover a multitude of sins. Give us a right trust of You, O Lord, that in repentance we would return to our Baptism daily, and in faith receive Christ's body and blood in the Supper. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, You have blessed us bountifully and given us daily bread. We implore You, preserve us from all covetousness and enliven our hearts to share Your gifts willingly with our brothers in need, that we may be found faithful stewards of Your gifts and abide in Your grace when we are removed from our stewardship and come before Your judgment; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**