

Sunday 24th March 2019

Purple



Collect

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

1 Corinthians 10:1-13 English Standard Version (ESV)

Warning Against Idolatry

10¹ For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers,^[a] 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^[b] 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^[c] 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.

Footnotes: a. or *brothers and sisters*. b. or *were laid low*. c. Some manuscripts *the Lord*.

COMMENT: Paul was a much younger contemporary of Jesus, but did not meet him until his unique resurrection appearance to Paul on the Damascus Road. As a well-educated Pharisee of the Hellenistic Diaspora rather than a peasant Galilean, Paul will have read the Hebrew Scriptures in Greek and interpreted them within the context of his own generation and culture. Because Paul died before the destruction of the temple ending the first Jewish Revolt of AD 66-70, it would be interesting to speculate how Paul might have dealt with that event and the subsequent triumph of the Pharisees in Judaism. We may well have one such reaction by a Christian leader in the unknown author of the Letter to the Hebrews. In this passage Paul drew on the story of the Israelites in the wilderness breaking their covenant with God to challenge

the Corinthians to live differently than their morally and spiritually corrupt society. But Paul was both honouring and condemning his ancestral traditions as he wrote to what may have been a predominantly Gentile Christian audience. He also likened the events of the Exodus led by Moses to the Christians' experience of baptism and the Eucharist. In verses 3-4 he even identified the manna and the rock which Moses struck to obtain water with the spiritual food and drink of the sacraments. Paul was saying to his Corinthian friends, that receiving the Christian sacraments will not save them as the Exodus and the wilderness experience in themselves did not save the Israelites? The words "*as some of them did*" sound like a drumbeat through this passage. Because of the Israelites' idolatry, he claimed, most of those who fled Egypt died in the wilderness long before the remnant straggled into the Promised Land. Their wandering away from the way mandated by the LORD, so they met their doom. Adherence to ritual is no guarantee of being in right relationship with God. Living must correlate with liturgy. Paul was also confronting some other issues, such as sexual immorality and idolatry and points to the brutal treatment of those who married Moabites and adopted the fertility god Baal of Peor described in Numbers 25:1-9, where twenty-four thousand, died by plague (Paul's twenty-three thousand is an inaccurate recall – yet the force of the example is not diminished). Paul sternly warned the Corinthians that their sexual behaviour could well have the same result, if for no other reason than that it is a common human failing (verses 7-8, 11-12). The seaport city of Corinth was notorious for sexual promiscuity and licentious living. The Corinthians had something to learn from the experience of the Israelites. At the same time, Paul did not leave them without a word of encouragement. The great benefit of the Christian life, he stated in verse 13, is not that they will be tested by their circumstances, but that God will not let them be tested beyond their strength to endure. Here, as always in Paul's declaration of the Christian way, that the grace of God provided the strength, not simply human moral effort.

Luke 13:1-9 English Standard Version (ESV)

Repent or Perish

13¹ There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴Or 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? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

⁶And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. ⁷And 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?' ⁸And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. ⁹Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

COMMENT: Luke gives us a glimpse of the violent and hostile world in which Jesus lived. Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who later condemned Jesus to death, had murdered a group of worshippers as they offered their sacrifices for the temple. Strangely, there is no other ancient record of this atrocity. Another group had been killed by a falling tower, part of Jerusalem's fortifications near the important water source, the pool of Siloam and its reservoir. Such tragedies would naturally produce great fear among common people. In the simplistic conventions of the times, these incidents would have been used by religious leaders to warn the general populace that such events resulted from sin on the part of the victims. Jesus explicitly refuted this simplistic traditional belief. Calamity can happen to anyone, sinner and righteous alike. As Messiah, Jesus used these incidents to call his fellow Jews to repent and believe in him. He foresaw disaster ahead for his people. Their only hope was to accept him for who he was and fulfil their historic mission of making God known to the world. In saying this, he clearly challenged the traditional view that the Jews held of their election as God's covenant people. All Jews regarded this divine favour with great pride. They looked for a Messiah who would rout their oppressors and establish Israel's worldly dominance. As the true Messiah come from God, Jesus had a quite different mission. The parable of the fig tree confronted them with a last chance to recognize him and to respond to God's mercy, or find that there is a limit to God's forbearance. The historian Professor Herbert Butterfield of Cambridge University, made a case for his conviction that God allows humanity the freedom to commit enormous sins such as the two world wars and holocausts of the early 20th Century. (Christianity and History, G. Bell & Sons, 1949.) Yet there is a sense, he claimed, that these great atrocities are also the very acts by means of which Providence resets the course of history. One can certainly read the OT stories of the Exodus and the Exile in Babylon in this light. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus can also be accounted for in this manner.

Psalm 85 Benedixisti, Domine. Grail Psalter

℟ Let us see, O Lord, your mercy.

¹ *For the Choirmaster. Of the sons of Korah. A Psalm.*

² O Lord, you once favoured your land
and revived the fortunes of Jacob,

³ you forgave the guilt of your people
and covered all their sins.

⁴ You averted all your rage,
you calmed the heat of your anger. **℟**

⁵ Revive us now, God, our helper!
Put an end to your grievance against us.

⁶ Will you be angry with us for ever,
will your anger never cease? **℟**

⁷ Will you not restore again our life
that your people may rejoice in you?

⁸ Let us see, O Lord, your mercy
and give us your saving help. **℟**

⁹ I will hear what the Lord God has to say,
a voice that speaks of peace,
peace for his people and his friends
and those who turn to him in their hearts.

¹⁰ His help is near for those who fear him
and his glory will dwell in our land.

℟ Let us see, O Lord, your mercy.

¹¹ Mercy and faithfulness have met;
justice and peace have embraced.

¹² Faithfulness shall spring from the earth
and justice look down from heaven. **℟**

¹³ The Lord will make us prosper
and our earth shall yield its fruit.

¹⁴ Justice shall march before him
and peace shall follow his steps. **℟**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: With this beautiful lament the psalmist pleads for God's mercy and justice. In curious juxtaposition to the foregoing prophecy, it presents a very hopeful attitude. It voices sincere humility and asks for salvation on the basis of God's past beneficence.

Short Preface

And now we give you thanks because you give us the spirit of discipline, that we may triumph over evil and grow in grace, as we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed.

Post Communion

Merciful Lord, grant your people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow you, the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Blessing

Christ give you grace to grow in holiness, to deny yourselves, take up your cross, and follow him; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among *you*, and remain with *you* always. **Amen.**