"Nothing New Under the Sun / Son"

Text: 1 Corinthians 10:6-13

7/24/2016

You ever notice that practically everything in life is just "same old, same old"? What I mean is that, no matter the change we experience, it's all just a variation on some essential thing that does NOT change. In other words, the more things change, the more they stay the same; there's nothing new under the sun. Those are cliché’s that speak to a fact of not only everyday life, but also our spiritual lives - when it comes to the daily struggle to be faithful in the midst of the many temptations of a sinful world, St. Paul writes in today's Epistle that:

"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man." (1 Corinthians 10:13)

There you go: nothing new under the sun. What that means for us today we look at now together.

As we do, we return to today's Epistle, where we hear again St. Paul say:

"... these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did." (v.6)

The "they" referred to there by Paul are God's people 'of old': the children of Israel, and the "these things" that serve as examples are the many ways they put God to the test, ultimately experiencing His judgment for their unbelief. Paul describes some of the things the people of Israel did that led to their demise: I forfeiture of being God's people: they worshiped idols; they practiced sexual immorality (which, it's interesting to note, seemed to grow out of their idolatry); they put God to the test by complaining about His provision of them; they grumbled against God, and His servant Moses, showing a distrust in Their/their ability to lead them. You can read about the specific circumstances of those sins of Israel by reading again through the books of Exodus (ch.s 17 & 32) and Numbers (ch.s 14, 16, 21 & 25). Suffice to say today, though, the children of Israel could be kind of smug at times; they took for granted what it meant to be God's people, and they ended up losing that status, and its blessing, in the end.

Are we any different? Don't we too face the same temptations as they did, with sexual immorality daily thrust before us by the world? (we talked about some of that last week). We too grumble and complain against God; we too sometimes fail to trust in His leading. Like Israel 'of old,' we are surrounded on all sides by those who worship false gods - those who fail to trust in the one true God: Father T Son and Holy Spirit, Who has made Himself known in the Person of Jesus Christ. That makes life more difficult than it needs to be, and when we experience that difficulty it can be just as tempting for us as it was for Israel to fall away from the faith.
Mindful of that, Paul gives us this warning:

"...let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man." (vs. 12-13g)

Paul says there that it's a real danger for us Christians to end up under God's judgment by falling away from the faith. When it comes to the things that tempt us to do that, we face many of the same temptations as did God's people 'of old,' and just as they fell so too can we, if we're not careful. It's been that way since the beginning, and so when it comes to the temptation to turn away from God to the trust of others or ourselves, there's really nothing new under the sun.

That was certainly the case for Paul in his day. When he wrote the words of today's Epistle, he was in the town of Ephesus, having heard from others that there was trouble in the church at Corinth. Paul had been at Corinth previously on his travels, and while there he had founded a church - the church to which he wrote the Corinthian letters of the New Testament. Corinth was a pagan city, full of as much idolatry and sexual immorality as one could want. In many ways it would've been like any of the major metropolitan areas of today's western world - full of as many different sexual orientations and ideas of right and wrong as you could imagine, a veritable smorgasbord of shame and vice.

As we could imagine, it was difficult for the Christians at Corinth to maintain their faith, surrounded on all sides by so much that was contrary to it. It couldn't have made it any easier when Paul left them, after app. 1 ½ years, to continue his missionary journeys. I'm sure the temptation to give up the faith altogether was great. Either that, or they may have been so confident in their faith (overconfident?) that they failed to take seriously the evil they were tempted to commit. The latter seems to be the case from what Paul says, again:

"... let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."

Paul cites Israel as an example, and as a warning of how serious God's judgment can be. And as he does he says: "Be careful. People a lot more grounded in faith than you have fallen."

The same goes for us; we need to heed Paul's warning no less than the Corinthian Christians, for like them, due to our sin, we are just as susceptible to temptation. We talked last week about some of the ways today's world has drifted away from its Creator; we considered the lies told to us by our leaders, and how people believe the lies and follow after those telling them with nary a thought. What we need to remember today is that we too are just as susceptible to the lies, and if we believe them instead of God's Word we'll be just as capable of falling under God's judgment as was Israel, so long ago. There's nothing new in that.
BUT there is something new for us to consider, something we find mentioned in v. 11 of today's Epistle, where Paul says:

"These things (again, the things of God's judgment of Israel for her unbelief) happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come."

Did you hear that?: the End of the ages has come upon us, for we live in the time of Jesus. Which means that not only will God help us resist temptation - and Paul says He will when he writes:

"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, ..."

not only that, but even when we succumb to temptation GOD'S MERCY IS STILL AVAILABLE TO US IN HIS SON, Who died on a cross to pay for our every sin. That's new. The incarnation, life, death, resurrection from the dead and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ brought something new upon the whole world and all of history: God Himself actually visited His creation, to restore it to Himself with the mercy and forgiveness of His Son.

Of course, God's mercy was available to God's people Israel; they knew their sins were forgiven because of the blood of God's covenant with them - a blood shed and applied in the liturgy of animal sacrifice (see Leviticus). But that blood was ultimately only a type of the greater blood to come: the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, Who would shed His blood on a cross for the sins of all. The fulfillment of Israel's liturgy we have among us in the Divine Service of the Lord's Word & Sacrament of the Altar, where the Blood of God's Son is applied to us today in, with and under the wine of Holy Communion.

Sometimes we wish we could be like God's people 'of old'. I mean, wouldn't it be nice if we could actually witness a sea parted down the middle, or illness healed at the mere touch of a hand, or a drought quenched with rain at our command?. Wouldn't it be cool to witness God in that way? But then again, Israel witnessed all of that, and she still fell away. No, we actually have more than God's people 'of old' had: we have the living-again-after-having-been-crucified Son of God I the living-never-to-die-again Jesus, Who is even more in our midst today than He was Israel's centuries ago. As Paul goes on to write a couple of verses after those of today's Epistle:

"Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?"

(v. 16)
Yes, it is. And in that Communion with Christ we receive something new - something new under the sun I THE Son of God I the Body & Blood of God Himself. Paul tells us today that, again:

"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, ..."

The mercy and forgiveness of God's own Blood provides us the way of escape from every temptation, even temptation we've given-in to.

And that brings us back to where we began, where we said that, no matter the changes of life, everything is still basically "same old, same old." We've seen today that that is certainly the case when it comes to our sin, and the many temptations to fall away from God into it. BUT that is NOT the case when it comes to our salvation from sin. When it comes to that, we have something that God's people 'of old' only hoped for: God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, actually in our midst with the fruits of His death and resurrection. As we cling, in all things, to Christ's Word & Sacraments - despairing of ourselves and our own inability to resist temptation, we find plenty new under THE Son: not judgment, but mercy - the mercy and forgiveness of God. Indeed, we find God Himself -

- In Jesus' Name,

Amen!