

The Way of Escape
(1 Cor. 10:13)
Pastor Espinosa

Text: “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.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. 1st Corinthians 10:13 is a fairly well-known Scripture, or at least a vaguely-familiar one. People try to partially quote it anyway: “God will only give you as much as you can bear.” (something to this effect). Unfortunately, the half-measure citation leads to a lot of misunderstandings. One of them being this idea: “wait out the storm, God will only pile on so much; in time, you’ll make it through.” Unfortunately, this kind of misrepresentation of God’s Word only gets us into deeper trouble. We have to be careful, because while this Scripture is for encouragement as to what God does, namely:

- 1) God will not allow you to be tempted beyond your ability to resist the temptation.
- 2) God will provide the way of escape when you are in the midst of the temptation.

Still in all of this gracious work of God, you are called to take that “way of escape.” You need to use it; you need to walk through it. In your new life in Christ, you bear some responsibility. That’s something we don’t necessarily want to hear, but it’s true and this is why the season of Lent and indeed the entire Christian life is so often characterized by the holy cross. Crosses are heavy, crosses are painful, crosses are unpleasant, but they must be carried. We have that responsibility.

“Responsibility” is not a very strong word in Lutheran theology. Our sinful nature makes us helpless to save ourselves. God must do the saving. Even in our sanctification; our new lives in Christ (as we are now born-again and converted), we still rely on the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament to lead us. Still, this leading is not the leading of a corpse, but the leading of a new creation; one who says “Amen” to the leading of the Holy Spirit. So that – again – if you are being tempted, you are to acknowledge God’s faithfulness to His promise: “[God says] I’m going to give you a way of escape and when I do, use it. Walk through that door. Get busy in following the escape route. You are not a lame duck when it comes to temptation! I’m helping you; protecting you and giving you a way out, but when its presented to you: take it!”

This dear Christian is the part of God’s Word that we easily neglect. How often have we heard the irresponsible responses? “The devil made me do it.” “It’s just human nature.” “A leopard can’t change his spots.” “It’s just the way I am.” Excuse, after excuse, after excuse for why people do not live in God’s gracious promise to protect. He tempers the temptations themselves – as irresistible as they might seem, they are not irresistible, because the Lord also provides a way of escape from them; every temptation is resistible – and the Lord blesses us through His gracious guidance. But even the word “guidance” insinuates that we follow. We hear His voice of protection in the face of temptation. We are called to follow the way of escape.

If we do, we come out from under the temptation; if we don't we are overtaken by the temptation. We need to understand the difference: it is one thing to be tempted, but is entirely something else to give into it. So Luther explains in the Large Catechism: "Lead us not into temptation"...refers to times when God gives us power and strength to resist the temptation [1 Corinthians 10:13]. However, the temptation is not taken away or removed. While we live in the flesh and have the devil around us, no one can escape his temptation and lures. It can only mean that we must endure trials – indeed, be engulfed in them [2 Timothy 2:3]. But we say this prayer so that we may not fall and be drowned in them. To feel temptation is, therefore, a far different thing from consenting or yielding to it" [LC III 106-7].

And in this Scripture this morning we are taught that all temptation we face is common to man. There is nothing strange happening to you Christian when you face powerful temptations that threaten your faith and life; that threaten your family and good vocations. These are not strange spiritual confrontations. They are within the norm of human experience. You are not being singled out by an exceptional temptation. Don't give yourself that much credit. That is the work of the devil: to make you proud and egotistical; while trying to convince you that your temptation is so elegant, so powerful so that you have no choice but to succumb! Lie! Deception! Just not the case; just not true! Your temptation – whatever it may be – is common to humanity. You're not that special, don't worry; you're just a sinner like the rest of us. You're tempted. So what?! The good news is that God won't let you be tempted beyond your ability to resist and God will provide a way of escape so that you're able to resist and able to withstand. But remember: resist! Remember: endure! Remember: you have a part Christian. You are called to escape. You are not called to give into it so that you moan and groan about how human you are and about how you just couldn't resist. That is sin talking. Don't buy it! It's poison. It's deception!

One of my favorite biblical examples is Joseph: "Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, 'Lie with me.' But he refused and said to his master's wife, 'Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. He is not greater than this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her. But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, she caught him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me.' But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house." (Genesis 39:6b-13)

Joseph was confronted by a great temptation that did not ease up or cease. It was a temptation that continually confronted him, but do you see how he took the way of escape? He called the temptation what it was. He didn't try to pretty it up or pour perfume on it. In his heart and mind he had determined what potential was being set before him: "great wickedness and sin against God." Joseph did not allow himself to become mesmerized by sin's deception; making poison look like paradise; and then when the temptation reached its climax and Potiphar's wife literally grabbed hold of his garment, what did Joseph do? Did he stand there wrestling for his garment back? No, he ran. He took the way of escape!

That is, Joseph was not going to play games with his sinful flesh. He didn't make excuses for himself to stay in touch with ex-girlfriends; he didn't sit around playing with media on his i-pad or i-phone or i-touch or Ai-Yai-Yai device (whatever its called technology) waiting for pictures to go from just pictures to something else altogether (from mere advertisement to soft you know what, to hard you know what); he didn't play the game of "just one drink" while knowing that depending on who you are and what you're history and resistance is or lack thereof is, means that "just one" is all you need to lose it. Know thyself Christian. If you are having trouble with chocolate donuts, then don't stop by Winchell's just to use the Wi-Fi. The Lord is faithful: He won't let the temptation go too far; and He will provide the way of escape when it comes, but know when to resist; know when to run; know how to spot that door that says, "Way of escape," and don't sit around waiting for God to cause you to levitate or to beam you up. His way is His Word in your heart and upon your lips.

Thus St. Paul went to great lengths to warn the Corinthians. And he did so by giving them many examples of what the Israelites went through. Before giving this great Scripture of wisdom and encouragement: "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," he leads up to this Scripture on the way of escape, by reminding the Corinthians that in many instances many Israelites had foolishly ignored the way of escape when they were tempted.

Paul listed five (5) instances:

- 1) The Israelites had an intense craving for the meats associated with idols and they were discontent with God's manna. (1st Cor 10:6)
- 2) The Israelites allowed their idolatry to turn into sexual immorality when Aaron fashioned the golden calf. (1st Cor 10:7)
- 3) Once again they fell to self-indulgence, idol worship and fornication at Shittim at the very gates of the Promised Land. (1st Cor 10:8)
- 4) The Israelites were filled with impatience and complaining and despised the spiritual provision the Lord had provided them. (1st Cor 10:9)
- 5) The Israelites were overcome with grumbling against the Lord, completely discontent. (1st Cor 10:10)

Note the quality of temptation: it is all over the map. In some cases the temptation was the craving for food along with the temptation to be discontent; in other cases the temptation was about false worship and sexual immorality; sometimes it was temptation towards self-indulgence; and still in other instances the temptation was for being impatient and to complain and in the most extreme cases to grumble so as to be discontent toward the Lord Himself. St. Paul knew that the Corinthian Christians could succumb to these temptations just as many of the Israelites had. And this Word is left for you and me, because we too are confronted by such temptations.

We are called to be alert and aware dear Christians. There is the constant assault of our own flesh, the voice of tolerance for everything under the sun from the world, and the assaults of

the evil one for us to succumb to temptation rather than flee from it and resist it through the Lord's way of escape. We too are tempted:

1. To be discontent with the Lord's provision, and to want more to the extent that we are tempted to compromise ourselves.
2. To engage in false worship – to love something more than God – and we should never be surprised by the sexual compromise that follows.
3. To be self-indulgent even in the face of God's gifts.
4. To be impatient and complaining even when the Lord provides.
5. To grumble even towards the Lord; grumbling even against His very Word and His faithful ministers.

Are we susceptible to such things? Of course we are, and we are called to see that the Lord has been faithful so that we are not sitting ducks to these evil traps designed to destroy our faith and life.

Three Sundays ago, Pastor Mueller preached on our Lord in the wilderness. He was tempted for 40 days. Lent begins with temptation, continues with temptation, and ends with temptation. Lent begins with our Lord's temptation in the wilderness; His constant temptation during His public ministry to stop His service for us; and of course His temptation even while He died on the cross. In every instance dear Christian, the Lord was faithful. In every instance He took the way of escape. In every instance He resisted the temptation.

St. Paul says that in the Lord's faithfulness that the Lord continues also to provide a way for you to escape, but in every instance that essential way of escape is Jesus Himself. When you are tempted to be discontent, see your way of escape: Jesus Christ who gives you all you need and more than you could ever ask for. To have Him is to have the greatest provision, because everything else will eventually wear out and rot, but not Christ, not your Savior. When you're tempted to follow some other guide for life and in effect start living in a new religion, when you are tempted to make other things in life more important than the Lord, then see Jesus your escape: He is the true Lord who "adds all things to you" as you seek Him first and His righteousness. He makes you His holy temple, so that you see your body is more than just a vehicle for stimulation, but is rather a temple of the Holy Spirit; Jesus is your way of escape because His gifts to you are greater than the illusions of the self-indulgent mind; He is your way of escape when you face your own impatience, because He is patient with you and doesn't want anyone to perish, including you; and He is your escape when you grumble, because even when sinners grumbled at Him to give up His mission to save you, He resisted. He is your escape from temptation and sin, because He died so that you would not be overcome and rose so that you would know that in Jesus, the greatest escape has already been accomplished: not even death can overcome you since the Lord who faced all temptation for you is risen!

When you're tempted, see the way of escape: Jesus. Hold to Him and temptation will not stand, but you *will* because the Lord died for sinners who have fallen to temptation; and He died for forgiven sinners who now have the way of escape. These are yours: forgiveness for all the times you've fallen; and the way of escape for the next time. Jesus is your escape. Your escape from temptation, from sin, from condemnation, and from death. Your escape to life. Take the way of

escape Christian, because God will not let you be tempted beyond your ability to resist; and because God will provide a means of escape from any temptation. Jesus is your guarantee!