

Worship-at-home

March 20, 2022

Third Sunday of Lent



“Tested beyond your strength?”

God calls us to worship:

Seek the Lord while God may be found. Call upon God who is near.

We will return to the Lord our God.

God’s thoughts are not our thoughts. God’s ways are not our ways.

We come, seeking new paths to follow.

As the heavens are higher than the earth so are God’s ways higher than ours.

We come as pilgrims on the journey, praising God along the way.

We offer our prayers:

God, our Creator and Sustainer,

in you we live and move and have our being.

In your depths we find meaning; in your heights we find light and joy.

You are the source of peace and hope for all who turn to you.

You alone have been our help and our guide;

you give us strength and courage when we face challenges.

In you we find rest and welcome along the way.

We praise you, O God, for your steadfast love.

Draw near to us once more in this time of worship.

Reveal your purposes for us

and prepare us for the days ahead

so that our lives may witness to your mercy and grace

as we follow Jesus.

**Merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed.
We have not loved you
with our whole heart, mind, and strength;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy forgive what we have been,
amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be,
so that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your holy name.
Amen.**

God offers the assurance of grace:

Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn us? Only Christ –
And Christ died for us; Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us,
Christ prays for us.
In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.
By Christ's mercy, we can make a fresh start following him.

Accept God's pardon,
and be at peace with God, with one another, and with your own self.

And give thanks to the Lord,
for He is good;
His love endures forever.

We offer our lives and resources:

Offering plates are positioned as you enter and leave the sanctuary. If you'd prefer to use e-transfers, please speak with Rev. Ian, Judy Armstrong (St. Andrew's), or Howard McKellar (Knox)

Hymn: #198 "I hunger and I thirst"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxeor5bisUI>

God speaks to us in His Word:

READ ISAIAH 55:1-9
PSALM 63:1-8
1ST CORINTHIANS 10:1-13

Tested beyond your strength?

1. I'm sure you've heard the expression: "God never gives you more than you can handle." Maybe you've said it yourself. Maybe someone's said it to you in an effort to comfort you during a particularly difficult time in your life.

The origin of that saying is 1st Corinthians 10:13:

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength...

The greater context is Paul's warnings to the Corinthian Christians against idolatry and the immorality of the non-Christians with whom they lived and worked. The testing to which he refers is the desire to do what their neighbours were doing. They saw their neighbours eating, drinking, having a good time, and engaging in what Paul perceived as "sexual immorality" – all of which was coupled with worship practices that were outside the scope of those of Yahweh's covenanted community.

Paul was simply encouraging his readers that they don't need these activities in order to be fulfilled or to be true to their own identities. They are children of the Living God, adopted into the holy family through Jesus Christ and united with him by the Holy Spirit. In Christ, by the Spirit, the Father provides the food and drink that is needed to satisfy our core longings and deepest desires.

This carries all the more import when you read further in the chapter of Paul's record of the institution of the Lord's Supper.

In Jesus, we can drink of that life-giving stream; have our thirst quenched, and our soul revived.

So, said Paul, stay away from these things. They're not needed, and they will only veil your eyes of faith to the glory that is before you and within you.

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength...

Sadly, when this verse is quoted in an effort to console, the unintended affect on the recipient can run the spectrum

from shame: that I am not a good enough person for God's love, because I *am* being tested beyond my limits;

to guilt: that I have sinned too much to receive God's care, I number among those whom God struck down in the wilderness;

or humiliation: that I am making more of my troubles than they deserve; after all, no testing has overtaken me that is not common to everyone!

Despite these unintended negative consequences, the meaning of the verse remains true:

God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength...

To which we must always add the rest of the verse:

but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

2. Does God ever give us more than we can handle?

No.

Are we ever faced with more than we can handle?

Yes.

A false belief held by Christians and non-Christians alike which I think is a factor in the unintended consequences of which I just spoke, is that because of Jesus, we ought to be free from suffering. Suffering should not exist in a world in which abides a good and powerful God!

In his second letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul wrote about how he suffered some sort of ongoing physical pain. He called it a "thorn in his side." He wrote about how he pleaded with the Lord to remove the affliction. After all, doesn't Jesus heal and restore? God never gives you more than you can handle! Followers of Jesus ought to be free from troubles!

To which the Lord replied:

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.¹

Paul went on to write:

¹ 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.²

3. God is not the source of our troubles and temptations. The day will come when Christ returns, the dead are raised, heaven is wed with earth, and there is no more pain. That day is foreshadowed in Christ's resurrection and as Jesus moves through his church and his disciples in the power of the Spirit to bring God's word of grace and tangible signs of healing mercy.

And yet, troubles and temptations do persist.

This is why Jesus came and why he went to the cross.

On the cross Jesus has done for us, in our place, and on our behalf what we do not have the strength to do for ourselves.

On the cross Jesus has defeated the source of temptations. He has overcome the power of darkness. He has forgiven sin.

Through the cross, God imparts His strength to us, His victory to us, His light to us, and His grace to us.

By the cross on which Christ was crucified, God provides the way that we may be able to endure in a way that bears witness to His reality, goodness, and ability; and promotes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control in Christ's name.

On the cross Christ has accomplished all that is necessary for us to endure this life in *his* strength and bear witness to *his* grace, mercy, and peace.

4. I have known – and I'm sure you have as well – several followers of Jesus who endured all kinds of difficulties throughout their lives: from experiencing war, to immigration, to poverty in their new home country, to all manner of illnesses to chronic pain, to strained relationships with family members. And yet, in their speech there was

² Ibid.

a sense of joy and contentment. A sense that it was well. And as they faced their death, they did so with a smile.

I think there are few more convincing testimonies to the reality, grace, and mercy of Jesus Christ and the indwelling strength of the Holy Spirit and the love and ability of the heavenly Father, than a Christian who can endure this life with a smile.

Divine strength is most effectively displayed through Christian fortitude.

This doesn't mean that Christians shouldn't worry or cry out in anger!

For all the peace that's expressed in Psalm 63, it ends with a wish for David's enemies to be dealt a violent death – given over to the power of the sword and left as prey for jackals!

When we're struggling with illness or pain or discouragement or addictions – whether in us or others, it's natural to plead that Christ remove us from that circumstance; or, remove the circumstance from us. And it's good and right to cry out with the raw language of our uncensored emotions.

However, it does mean that we do so appropriately: that, in prayer, we direct our frustrations, discouragements, bitterness, and anger to the One who alone can deal with them justly and satisfy that for which we long.

God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength; as a follower of Jesus, your strength is that of Christ's.

So,

*Everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!³*

³ Isaiah 55:1

The call is to seek to encounter the Lord in the sanctuary and in the privacy of our own heart and mind.

In your imagined – but not imaginary – Sacred Space, raise your hands in praise and prayer with thanksgiving and affirm the promises of the covenant-making God.

And as you seek the Lord in the morning and meditate on his past help in the sleepless watches of the night, open your heart and mind to receive the strength of the Crucified Victor, and in that light of life, confront your troubles in the grace, mercy, and peace of the triune God.

For the health of our souls, the good of our societies, and the glory of God.

Amen.

Hymn: #671 “I heard the voice of Jesus say”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74kyfROS4q8>

We respond in prayers of thanksgiving and intercession:

God of Hope,
When the world is confusing and frustrating,
you bring light and hope.
We give you thanks for lessons learned, for changes of heart,
for fresh discoveries made, and new paths followed,
even during these months of pandemic.
We pray this day for those who are confused or afraid.
for those who feel anger or despair.

Keep a brief silence.

O God, give us hope in our time.
Turn our hearts to you.

God of Peace,
there is so much conflict, hostility, and antagonism
around us and within us.
Personal relationships are often tense; the world community at odds.
We pray for understanding to prevail
in relationships at home and at work,
in our community and our country.
And we pray for diplomacy to end conflict and threat among nations

*especially holding before you the Ukraine and its people
... (add names of other conflict zones in the world)*

Keep a brief silence.

O God, give us peace in these times.
Turn our hearts to you.

God of Joy,
we give you thanks for moments of joy and celebration in our lives,
for small pleasures given and received through times of isolation.
We remember those who feel left out or bitter,
those who are anxious or in distress.
We pray for those who face loss and hardship in these uncertain times,
and all who know sorrow and suffering,
naming before you those on our hearts this day.

Keep a longer silence.

O God, give us joy in our time.
Turn our hearts to you.

God of community and compassion,

we thank you for your steadfast presence
in the face of all that brings uncertainty and worry these days.
Bless our congregation and every church that is struggling;
inspire us to consider renewed ministry and mission
after months of restricted gatherings.
Reawaken our love for one another
and our desire to worship and serve together in Jesus' name.
Sustain leaders who feel exhausted by the challenges they've faced
and renew our stewardship with gratitude for your love.

Keep a brief silence.

O God, give us strength in our service.
Turn our hearts to you.

God of grace,
Receive these prayers and the unspoken prayers of our hearts.
Deepen our trust in you for the days ahead,
for we offer ourselves as Jesus' friends and followers in the words he taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

God sends us with God's blessing:

Hymn: #365 "This is the threefold truth"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eXZqTfFoRI>

Blessing