

In Nomine Iesu

Second Sunday in Lent 2026

Now these things happened to them as an example – Exodus 17:1-16

“All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’ And Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?’ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, ‘Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?’ So Moses cried to the Lord, ‘What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.’ And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.’ And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massa and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’”

Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. So Moses said to Joshua, ‘Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.’ So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses’ hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword. Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.’ And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The Lord Is My Banner, saying, ‘A hand upon the throne of the Lord! The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.’”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who accompanied His people through the wilderness to the promised land. Dear fellow redeemed:

Our sermon text for this morning is another long one. What is more, it seems not to have an obvious, unified theme or subject to it. So, how do we approach such a text and apply what it teaches to our hearts and lives? Preachers and teachers of God’s word have considered such things before us. After all, the Christian Church has been around for 20 centuries. So, where could we go to find some help? The best advice is always to go to the Scriptures themselves, for God’s word is always the best and most reliable interpreter of itself.

I

When the Apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the Christian congregation in Corinth, he was addressing a congregation that was having problems. There was dissension and discord in the congregation, not unlike the dissension and discord among the Israelites themselves as they traveled by stages after leaving Egypt, encountering one difficulty after another. So, Paul directed their attention to the Old Testament, to Israel in the wilderness between Egypt and the land God had promised to give to them, Canaan. He said:

“For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of

them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.”

To begin, we ask, why did Paul say, “our fathers,” to the Corinthian congregation? Most of those in the congregation were not ethnic Israelites, they were Gentiles, Greeks. We could ask in the same manner: In what way are the people of Israel who wandered through the wilderness our fathers? Humanly speaking, they are no more our fathers than they were fathers to the Greek Christians of Corinth. But, dear friends, Paul is not speaking about their physical relationship to us, but their spiritual relationship. If the same apostle could say to the Galatians and to us, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise,” then we also are spiritual descendants, spiritual children, of the Israel that followed Moses out of Egypt, into the wilderness, to Mt. Sinai.

We are to read the Old Testament, according to Paul, so that we see in God’s people of that time ourselves, both the good and the bad. It is of course good and welcome to hear from Paul that we are children of Abraham. It is less comfortable for us to hear that we are very much like the fickle, difficult, complaining Israel that followed Moses into the wilderness. But isn’t that what Paul intended to point out to us by using the words, “our fathers”? They were fathers to the Corinthians two thousand years ago and they are fathers to us now.

The record of God’s people of the Old Testament is a valuable one for us, so that we see ourselves in them, the good, the bad, and the ugly. But this also means that God loved them as He loves us. He promised them a Savior even as He promises us. So, the most valuable lesson to take from the Old Testament is not just that we are like Israel – though to be sure we are! – but that God is and will be as faithful and gracious to us as He was to them.

In other words, the Old Testament shows us the nature of man and how sin affects him. It is not a pretty picture. It is not flattering to us. But that is good. The law, as we learned when we went through the Catechism, whether as children or adults, is a mirror that shows us our sins and weaknesses. The Old Testament record of God’s people functions like that mirror, showing us ourselves in them. But it also shows us all the good things God has done for His people through centuries, His patience, His goodness, His all-seeing gracious wisdom, His faithfulness to Israel in keeping all the promises He made to them.

II

Paul, writing by inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, tells us something very important when he says, “For [Israel] drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.” Christ, long before He was born of Mary and walked among us as a man, was with them, not visibly, but actually. He was, as Paul says, “the spiritual Rock that followed them.” Christ was the Rock they stood before at “Massa and Meribah” even as they quarreled with Moses. He was the Rock who answered Moses’ fearful plea, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” He assured Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” Christ, the Rock, would give them water to drink and, more importantly, spiritual water for their souls, just like Jesus assured the Samaritan woman at the well.

Consider the text before us, both the account of Israel’s accusations against Moses at Massa and Meribah and its fear when they fought against Amalek not many days later. What are we, the children of the New Testament, being told? What are we being assured of? We are being told that our fallen and sinful nature always has a hard time following what God says, always has a hard time doing things in the way He shows us. Did God not know that Israel would

need water in the Sinai desert in the fifty days it would take them, young and old, men and women, sick and healthy, together with their children and their animals? He did! Did He, as they accused Moses, lead them out here into the desert to kill them? He did not! Do we not think such things of God ourselves? Why did He give us the Ten Commandments? Did He not know how hard they would be to keep in this modern world where our neighbors easily disregard them? Did He not know that His telling us to live our lives differently than those around us would cause us to have problems with our neighbors? Well, did He know? Yes, He did. It was all part of His wisdom and love to get us through the wilderness that is life to the promised land, to heaven, which is something we from time to time forget and overlook.

Why did He direct Israel to fight Amalek, a people He said were completely, wholeheartedly enemies of Israel, His chosen people? Amalek, dear friends, are those who hate God and hate His people. Do we not have the equivalent of Amalek in our day and age? We do. There are those ideologies that are opposed to everything that is Christian. And the people who follow those ideologies will never, ever be reconciled to us. They in fact hate us. There I said it. I said the truth. They hate us. To fight them do we return hate for hate? No. We follow the Rock, Jesus Christ, and what He teaches us. We do not hate them. We love them. We treat them as we ourselves desire to be treated. Do we compromise our faith with their ideology? No! Absolutely not! We hate their ideology, for it is opposed to truth; and it will bring only sorrow and destruction to all who follow it. But we love all those individuals – **some of whom may be our family and neighbors!** – who are deluded and follow such lies, and we pray for them, asking God to transform them from Amalekites to faithful Israelites.

The Apostle Paul says to us, assures us: “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. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 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.”

These things happened to them as an example ... for us! God so loved the world! He not only loved them, He loves us. He is leading us onward to the promised land, to heaven, helped by their example, guided to their example ... and, especially, by His example: faithful, merciful, gracious, and wise. He never lost sight of His promise to Israel, to bring them to the land that He promised to them through their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He never lost sight of the promise even though they often did.

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Paul, thinking back to those Old Testament lessons that he himself learned from when he was a child, much as we learned from our parents, Sunday School teachers, and confirmation and Catechism instruction, tells us the importance of our taking to heart these things. He says to us urgently, “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. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 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.” When we fall short of keeping what we have learned from their example, bad and good, we have a way of escape. We have the Means of Grace that God holds out to us when we fall. We have the Gospel, the good news of forgiveness in Christ, our Rock. We fall back on our Baptism, in which God claimed us as His own dear children. We have Absolution, with which we begin every Sunday service. We have the Lord’s Supper. These are the “way of escape” our Lord has prepared for us as we, like Israel, move by stages through life. Fall back then on God’s “way of escape,” His forgiving word and sacrament. For He is faithful. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria