

## Sermon – 17.07.2016

**Text: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 / Luke 13:1-9**

**Theme: God is faithful**

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*In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Intr** - Dear friends, beloved in the Lord!

The text of the epistle for today talks about temptation. When we talk about temptations, what usually comes to mind are the ones we could call ‘Classical temptations’: Money, sexuality, gossip, infidelity, greed... They look pretty obvious and they are out there all the time, inviting us to escape the ‘boring’ faith environment to try some breath-taking adrenaline-boosting options...

To warn the church about this, Paul links the Corinthian church to the Israelites in their exodus from Egypt and their wilderness wanderings. As an exegete puts it “Paul urges the Corinthians to learn from the mistakes of the ancestors’ unfaithfulness. It is often noted that the behaviors explicitly described in verse 6-10 are behaviors with which the Corinthians struggle -- particularly, sexual immorality (verse 8) and grumbling (verse 10).” The church in Corinth had a double fold temptation among them. They had the danger of being swallowed by the temptations of the surrounding pagan world, but had also the extreme danger of the internal divisions and disagreements. It could potentially destroy them, pulling them in directions that would keep them from living and growing according to God’s word.

These “classical” temptations, as we put it, are still around us. They push us away of the Word, pressing on the congregations of the saints. But I would also like to talk about some other kind of temptation. I am speaking of those temptations that sometimes become *authorized, justified, or invisible*. We do not perceive them anymore as temptations. They don’t show up as a visible golden calf. They get into people’s lives as they try to find good reasons to show

how there's nothing wrong in that. Sometimes, they may become even a way of life.

## 1 – The “invisible” temptations

Let me list several examples:

*First, - To look for constant happiness.* Think of the digital world. When we go online we think that everybody seems to be so overwhelmingly happy while our life is so full of problems! Friends are traveling, celebrating, smiling, having fun... Then those words ring in our ears: “You are meant to be happy. You deserve happiness. Go for it!”. There's a lot of people trying to sell us the idea that in your happiness there's little bit of forbidden. If things do not go right, just change your house, change your spouse, your boss, your friends, your church.... “You were born to be happy”. And all of the sudden we find ourselves trapped into this invisible temptation thinking it is ok to live with such a pressure of being happy all the time, with the resulting frustration to deal with.

*Second-A life of complaint.* This is the opposite of the previous one. In this case, we are tempted to accept that we are The Miserable ones whose lives are always getting the worst of all. We have not enough money, we get sick too often, our job is terrible, nobody calls us, almost nobody notices we exist .... We internally become that cartoon character who was always moaning “Oh me, oh my, oh dear”. The one exercises a type of selfishness which someone called “the power of the victim”. By becoming the victim, one can at the same time start to control everything around acquiring great power.

*Third - Well, I may be wrong BUT...* The first part, “I may be wrong” is erased by the adversative conjunction *but*. In Brazil, it's quite common hearing people, especially famous ones to use the catch phrase “I have no regrets”. Or: “I do not repent on anything I did”. The reason? “Even the mistakes made me grow up the better person I am today”. But even if one admits he or she may have done

something wrong then one adds a 'however', to justify the desire to be free of the need of repentance.

Fourth -To *adapt God to the philosophical, pragmatic and social needs of our time*. We are constantly tempted to make God to be in compliance with the *Zeitgeist*(spirit of the time). The world pressure us not to be so narrow minded as to believe in an old book of tales and 'metaphors', but to accept new ways of seeing things. Specially, to accept new concepts of life, faith and behavior that clash with God's Word, devising good reasons to justify it.

Fifth-*Follow your heart* – That became almost an unquestionable *mantra* of modern times. It seems that the heart became one of the most powerful rulers of our present world. If you 'follow your heart', then you must be right. Not many people would take a minute to think what would happen if your heart is following the wrong person, the wrong reason - or following nothing at all.

These temptations - and many other examples could be recalled - often are ones that go unnoticed. They become part of life. Even inside the church, even in the family of faith. We are tempted to adopt a way of life in which temptation becomes invisible and justified...

Then here comes Paul and St. Luke to make us get real, preaching the law in its strictness. "But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish", says Jesus. "Let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls", admonishes Paul. Sin is sin, whether we recognize it or we just adapt it to our way of living. Sin is tied so tight to our human nature that outside of the God's forgiveness and Love we have no hope of escaping eternal damnation.

"Well, pastor, I know that sin is a biblical teaching and must be taught. But aren't we sometimes too much negative? Like, look at

this fig tree story that ends with “you can cut it down”. Shouldn’t we try to be a little more positive?” That reminds me of a story:

“Paul was talking to a friend about his last medical appointment.

-The doctor said that my eyes are perfect. My lungs are correctly functioning, my kidneys work fine and my heart couldn’t be better. Ah, and about cholesterol and blood pressure... nothing wrong with them!

-Oh, wow, said the friend. - But Paul...didn’t you go to see the doctor because of a back ache?

-That’s right.

-So why did the doctor tell you only what’s good? Didn’t he point out what’s wrong so you can cure it?

-Oh, yes, he did try to talk about what is bad, but I wouldn’t listen. I like only to hear about what is good.”

That seems to be an x-ray of our world. Many people don’t want to hear anything about what’s really wrong and needs to be changed. You cannot talk about sin, guilt, lack of responsibility, depression, death... Nor discuss any other thing showing the truth that we are imperfect. “Hey, let’s change the issue, man”. “Be positive!” “Show the bright side of things!”... But do we go to the doctor to hear about what’s good or to know what’s wrong so we can fix it? If someone denies what is ill in his/her body, we all know where it may end...

## **2 – The mercy of the vinedresser**

Now, the doctor is telling us the truth. We were born unfruitful fig trees, we are sinners. But is that the purpose of the doctor, to say the plain truth and it’s over? We know it’s not. The fig tree parable, as unlikely as it may seem at first glance, is not designed to be “negative”. It’s a story of God’s love, care and mercy!

Jesus Christ points out our imperfection. Yes, He does. By nature, we are fruitless fig trees. But unlike many in our days who

have delight in finding sins only to hammer the sinner, He forgives. He loves and recovers our hearts. He brings us the cure for our worst illness. The follow up of the appointment with The Doctor is a new life where treatment and prevention walk together. He wants us to be always taking care of the most important health... spiritual health. Because this is our source of life everlasting. Through faith He digs around us and gives us another year of grace, forgiveness and life!

Jesus does not only provide a way of escape sin and temptation; ***he is the Way of escape***. Luther nailed it when he said that Christ came *to save us from ourselves*. Our hope, our strength, our salvation is outside ourselves. And yet it comes inward to our hearts, through faith, by grace in order to save us, to strengthen and to give us the assuredness that only His Word can do.

### **3 – God is faithful**

Now, we know we continue to be sinners. We know temptations keep knocking at our door all the time. We know that it is a nut hard to crack. Then, what do we do?

The common trend, our natural thinking would lead us to try to be better persons, to behave better, to please God. “If I only could be a little stronger, if I do obey a little better, then I’ll please God and have strength and power to overcome temptations. After all, there’s that bible verse in first Corinthians that says: “God won’t give you more than you can handle”.

This reminds me of an usual Brazilian saying: *Cheap becomes expensive*. It’s a saying used to define those situations when you buy something cheap intending to save some money but then you discover that the piece does not work well. Now you spent your money in a useless piece and will have to spend more money to buy the one you should have bought at the beginning of the whole story.

Cheap becomes expensive when we think of tackling temptations with our own hands. Once we learn from different sides

of society that 'you were born to be happy' by "doing it yourself", then cheap ways to do it overflow. Books, TV shows, advisors... You deserve to be happy so never mind if you have to be 'a little wrong' here, another one there, if you step over other people's back to upscale in life. Do a little better and become a little better. No problem! You deserve it.

Then the cheap becomes expensive. Broken marriages, relationships full of resentment, pain... The spiritual price to pay often is so high that people just breakdown.

Paul in first Corinthians shows something different. "**God** is faithful". "**God** won't let you be tempted". It is not about us receiving a burden from God and trying to handle it, to carry along. It's about **Him being faithful**, caring, being merciful by not allowing us to go beyond our strength. **He is de One doing the action**. He is the caring and loving One. Because the burden of sin was laid upon Christ, because He went to the cross in our place, we are made sure that even if temptations come, is not up to us, but up to Him. Like I read on FLC's website (and I didn't read it on other website so far) in the "about us" section: **It's not ABOUT US. It's about HIM**. We need the expensive one that became not cheap, but actually is given **free!**

Every Service reminds us that Our Savior Jesus paid the expensive price of our sins to assure us forgiveness, grace, new life. It is not cheap, it's for free! This love comes to our heart to fill it up, so we don't leave room for 'cheap offerings'. In Him we find that we are really meant to be happy. Only that this happiness is a result of God's work in our life and not an efforts of merely human feelings. Jesus comes to our hearts to assure us that He is digging around us every day, with His Word, so that we repent, put faith in Him and bear fruit. He is the source of all we need to face and overcome temptations. Also, when we fall, we have His forgiveness that lifts us up again and makes us walk in His love every new day!

Today's Psalm, 85, remembers us: 'You forgave the iniquity of your people. You covered all their sin. You withdrew all your wrath'.

Later on: "Surely His salvation is near to those who fear". Will we still be tempted? Of course, we will. Will we face temptation alone? Of course, we won't! As a fellow pastor wrote, "Our God gives us the way of Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; the way He gives us, His forgiveness, through His Word and Sacraments, our spiritual food and drink." God is love. God is grace. GOD IS FAITHFULL!

**Cc - *Illustration: Carried home.***

A fellow chaplain of The Lutheran University of Brazil told me this story that happened to him and his younger daughter. He was returning home from the grocery store with the plastic bags in his hands and having the toddler walking beside him. At some point of the way the kid insisted in carrying one of those bags, even after he saying she probably wouldn't be able to carry it 'till home.

-Are you sure you can do this, sweetie?

-Of course, daddy. I promise I'll carry this bag home - was her answer.

As they moved some yards on the girl started to show she was getting tired, as anticipated by the father. Finally, she asked. "Daddy, would you please, carry me in your arms?"

The request was granted.

When the father stood in the front door, he put the youngster back on the ground so he would be able to open it. That's when she proudly looked up and stated:

-See, daddy? I promised you I would bring this bag home in my hands!

Yes, temptations come. Whether 'classical' or 'invisible', they try to lead us astray. And yes, sometimes we think we took care of them with our own hands. But our father just looks down and smiles. He is the one acting. He is faithful. He is the loving Father. He always gives us another chance, another day, another month, another year! He forgives us, He takes us in His hands and sends us to bear fruit:

praising Him, loving our neighbor, fleeing from temptation. And we know He will carry us until our eternal home. Amen

Pastor Paulo, Brum (and Pr. Lucas Albrecht)  
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