

ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

HEBREWS 3:13

“But exhort one another every day as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

In the name of Jesus:

There is an old saying that goes like this: “History is prologue”. The meaning is simple, if you know a little history; you can have an indication of what may happen in the future. I look at this saying, history is prologue, and takes it to mean that you learn from history, from the experiences of others, so that you can grow and benefit from their trials and errors. Life is full of trials and errors, and in the terminology of our text for today, it is filled with discouragements and disappointments. Discouragements abound in life. Things which can go wrong often do go wrong. It is not Murphy’s Law, it is realism. A realistic look at life will take into account the disappointments and discouragements that will inevitably occur along life’s way.

God’s people have faced disappointments and hardships in the journey of life. The Children of Israel, even though they were chosen by God to be His people, had their share of hardship. That is not to say that they were not blessed by God. The children of Israel under the leadership of Moses were released from the bondage of their captivity in Egypt. Their release from bondage did not come easy. Pharaoh would not listen to Moses and his plea to let God’s people go. Pharaoh hardened his heart to God and His word. So God used Moses to do great things in Pharaoh’s sight, ten plagues were sent by God to show the power of God to the unbelieving Pharaoh. But Israel was still in bondage; their labor and hardship were increased.

God kept true to His word, He kept His promises to His people and through the Exodus God delivered His beloved people. He led the children through the parted waters of the Red Sea, safely to the other side. Pharaoh and his army pursued in vain, the waters of the Red Sea swallowed God's enemies. His people were saved. And yet, some complained, saying that it was only wilderness in front of them and it would have been better to stay in Egypt than face the hardships of the wilderness and desert.

In spite of the bitterness and complaining, God provided for His people, leading them through the wilderness, by fire at night and a cloud during the day. When they were hungry, God sent manna and quail from heaven. When they were thirsty, God led them to springs of flowing water. God saved His people and continued to provide for them. But it was not enough.

God, as we see in the Book of Hebrews, was provoked. He was angered at His chosen people. Why? Because they complained bitterly to God, they did not see what they had; they only saw what they thought they didn't have. They complained about their journey in the wilderness, because the journey was hard and it was long. They became discouraged in their journey. The writer to the Hebrews says that they, God's children, went astray in their hearts, building a golden calf, worshipping the idols of their enemies, and wanting to become more like the nations surrounding them rather than the people of God that they were called to be. And so God dealt with His people. He disciplined them so that they would turn to Him in faith. However, they did not enter into God's promised rest. They did not live to see the fulfillment of God's promises, so a new generation would then learn to not only trust in God but follow Him into the Promised Land.

The tale is the same in our age as well. Many people today have heard of God's mighty acts in history. Many have tasted and seen the goodness of God. They have become God's children in the waters of Baptism. They have worshipped and communed at the altar of God.

They even have experienced the grace of God today in that they have received the blessings and provisions of God in their lives. And yet, even as God was provoked in the past, even now He is not pleased.

Why? Because His own have lost sight of who they belong to and what God has done for them. It is true that the journey of life is long; man is born of a woman and lives 70-80 years in life. Human life is filled with disappointments and discouragements. The journey of following Jesus in life is difficult, Jesus says that the way is narrow, and sadly, many have lost their way.

Some have become discouraged and have given up the faith and the Christian walk. Others have gone astray, leaving the faith and following the gods of this world: money, pleasure, fame, popularity. They have sought to become like the world rather than live out their faith as the people of God. They have become interested in being popular or hearing the plaudits of man rather than the word of God. They absent themselves from the hearing of the Word, and the reception of the Lord's Supper.

Will they ultimately receive their heavenly reward? That is left for God to decide, judge not, lest we be judged. And yet, Jesus says that you know a tree by the fruit it bears. Note what Martin Luther says in his Large Catechism concerning Christians who absent themselves from worship and the reception of the Lord's Supper: that there are those who think that they are such strong Christians that they need not go to church or the Lord's Supper. They become quite brutish and finally despise both the Word and the Sacrament. Now it is true that no one should be forced to go to the Sacrament, but it must be known that such people as deprive themselves of, and withdraw from, the Sacrament so long a time are not to be considered Christians. For Christ has not Instituted it to be treated as a show, but has commanded His Christians to eat and drink it, and thereby remember Him. And, indeed, those who are true Christians and esteem the Sacrament precious and holy will urge and

Impel them unto it.

Now it is not our purpose or intent to brow beat those who call themselves Christian and do not take part in the life of the church. Rather, we are called to be the voice of Christ. Jesus never forces or coerces anyone to follow Him, He merely invites and encourages. This is what our text says today: "But exhort one another every day as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

God calls His children to be encouragers of brothers and sisters in the faith, particularly those who have fallen away from the faith. This is in accordance with God's will, for the Bible says that God wants all to be saved and come to know the truth of His love and salvation for all in Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's only begotten Son, God's faithful witness to sinners as to the heart and mind and will of God. To know Jesus is to know the Father, for Jesus and the Father are one. The Father's heart and nature towards sinners is revealed in Jesus, He who knew no sin who became sin for all of us. God doesn't condemn the sinner in Christ; rather He condemns Christ to save the sinner. Faith receives God's salvation in Jesus. Faith receives God's good and gracious invitation to a new life with Him in Jesus.

God invites us and every sinner to come to Him. Through the prophet Isaiah God invites: "Come now and let us reason together, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." (Isaiah 1:18). God is ready and willing to forgive all sin. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse all from all unrighteousness.

God has cleansed you in the precious blood of Jesus shed on Calvary's cross. That cleansing is given to you in Baptism, where you have become God's child. You have been given new life, an eternal life with God in Jesus Christ in your Baptism. You have been given a new life in Christ so that you would walk daily with Jesus, journeying with Jesus until you reach your

heavenly home. In the midst of the discouragements and trials of life, and they are many, you know them all too well, Jesus is ever present to give you strength for the journey. He daily speaks to you in His Word. He gives of Himself in the Sacrament, for the forgiveness of your sins and the strengthening of your faith, all so that you will leave with God's peace knowing that He is on your side. As you live for Him He contends for you, working all things out in your life to your good and His glory. God's challenge to you is to be faithful to your Savior, to strive to enter your heavenly rest, so that you may hear the beautiful words of the Master: Well done good and faithful servant, enter now into your heavenly reward.

This is why we contend for the faith, why we seek to be faithful to Christ, and this is why we exhort and encourage others to be faithful to Jesus as well. We live our lives not to brow beat, not to find fault, not to nag, or even give a sinner a guilt trip. We live to proclaim Christ and Him crucified and raised again. We come in the name of Christ to share the power of Christ in and through us. We continue not to lose heart, but to invite, encourage and plead all sinners to come and be God's friend in Jesus Christ. For those who are wearied by the journey we seek to give them the strength that comes from Jesus. We know that the devil always opposes the Christian, seeking to drive the child of God from Jesus, seeking to separate them from His peace and love. This is why we continue to encourage and invite, giving of ourselves to Christ's cause and work. Now is the day of salvation, now is the time for all to believe. Now is the time that God gives us to work, to strive, to encourage, to invite all to believe in Jesus, so in keeping with God's good and gracious will of seeking and saving the lost.

During a championship prize fight, the trainer said to the battered fighter between rounds: "Champ, you're going great! He ain't laid a glove on you!" The fighter responded: "Well, you better keep an eye on the referee then, because somebody in this ring is beating the daylights outta me."

There are brothers and sisters who feel like a battered fighter, losing the fight for the faith. Still others don't even know that they are in a battle. But we know differently. Satan is alive and well. As Luther writes in his Large Catechism: "We Christians must be armed and daily expect to be constantly attacked. No one may go on in security and carelessly, as though the devil were far from us. At all times we must expect and block his blows. Though I am now chaste, patient, kind, and in firm faith, the devil will, this very hour, send such an arrow into my heart that I can scarcely stand. For he is an enemy that never stops or becomes tired. So when one temptation stops, there always arise others and fresh ones."

We need encouragement, and so God gives it to us in His Word and Sacrament. And He sends us out that we might be encouragers to others, inviting others to hold fast to Christ, in whom there is eternal life.

Amen