



YOUNG ADULT SUNDAY

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

Sunday, August 11, 2013

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Lection – 1 Corinthians 10:13 (New Revised Standard Version)

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

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

This Sunday's lectionary, which is focused on young adults (typically persons age 18–39) provides a unique opportunity to engage, reach out to, and encourage this segment of the Black Church. Although faced with unique challenges and perhaps a more complex world than their grandparents and parents, like their forbearers, young adults need to be affirmed and spiritually nurtured so that their hopes, ideals, and positive qualities are celebrated and encouraged by their

faith communities so that they will know that with God's help they can survive and thrive, no matter the test.

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: 1 Corinthians 10:13

Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

Today's African American young adults, called Generation Y, the Millennial generation, Generation Next, or the Net Generation, face a world that is, in many ways, nothing like that of their parents. Today's young adults are coming of age in a world that researchers have dubbed not only technology-saturated, but also highly mobile and accessible, increasingly global, and significantly more "colorblind" with a more diverse job market (the Pew Research Center). Yet African American Millennials are painfully aware that the spread of and access to technological resources, quality education, and jobs that pay a living wage continue to be impacted by race and class. They know the irrational prejudice heaped upon young black men and women and the often racially biased senseless killings of far too many of their peers.

Those who have come of age in distressed areas know what it's like to be subjected to the lowest performing schools with little to no access to technology in the classroom. They are a generation that faces skyrocketing college costs, crushing student loan debt, a backlash against Affirmation Action, and an economy that has shed much of its manufacturing jobs while at the same time decreasing high-paying employment opportunities overall. In fact, while the unemployment rate has risen to 13.1 percent for all Americans between the ages of 18–29, it is a whopping 22.1 percent among African Americans of this age group. Still, amidst all of this doom and gloom, there's a sliver of sunshine: a recent Gallop Well-being poll¹ found that black Millennials remain optimistic about their lives and their standard of living getting better.

On this Sunday, African American young adults should be affirmed in their refusal to feel trapped or bound by the contemporary predominant tendencies, statistics, and situations that test their sense of self and endurance. Their willingness and capacity to step out on faith and endure in Christ in order to pursue lives filled with meaningful contributions, compassion, and loving relationships should be celebrated.

Part II: Biblical Commentary

Today's text, found in the book of 1 Corinthians and ascribed to the Apostle Paul, is addressed to the Christians at Corinth. Famous for its intellectual and material prosperity, Corinth, the capital of Achaia, was perhaps the richest and most important city in Greece. Paul founded the Church at Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:6-17) and ministered there for more than eighteen months, longer than in any other city except Ephesus. After he leaves, however, serious problems arise in the church at Corinth. Discord breaks out within the assembly. Factions arise due to loyalties to particular messengers (Acts 1:10-17), the boasting of those who saw themselves as "the best and the brightest" (1:18–2:16), oppositional attitudes toward leaders, including Paul (4:1-21), scandalous sexual behavior, and other divisive behavior that corrupts their relationship with God and one another (5:1–6:20) and reveals an overall misunderstanding of the Christian message.

Paul's admonishments to this emerging Christian congregation can be summed up in two challenges: (1) in the midst of diversity, seek unity in Christ, and (2) cultivate "God-confidence" instead of self-confidence. Our focus for today is the latter of these two challenges—cultivating "God-confidence" in the midst of testing!

One of the strengths of the ancient Hebrews was their faithfulness to their corporate identity. They believed that they were a unique group of people, who had endured suffering, but were deeply loved by God. Paul reminds the Church at Corinth how these spiritual ancestors of theirs were delivered by God through the Exodus from Egypt (10:1-12). God graciously leads the Hebrews "under a cloud" (10:1) through the Red Sea, in what Paul calls a type of symbolic baptism, and feeds them "the same spiritual food" and "the same spiritual drink" (10:3-4), or food and drink endowed with the divine potency of the Spirit. Still, they lose sight of God's deliverance when difficulties arise. Most of them are defeated by their testing during the hard times in the desert, and God was not pleased.

The tendency of these new, Corinthian believers may be to create a new identity possibly because they lack the sense of belonging shared by Israel's descendants. But believers in Corinth are not part of a new movement; they are, for Paul, a fresh expression of the historic movement of God. And so, presupposing the Corinthians' knowledge of the Hebrew people's history, Paul details these incidents for those standing at the end of one age and on the threshold of a new age to come. Just as the Exodus was a great deliverance from bondage for the Hebrews, the Gospel of Jesus Christ brings deliverance to the church at Corinth.

Indeed, the Corinthians had experienced a great salvation, as they had been delivered from Roman and spiritual enslavement through Jesus Christ, into the community of the redeemed (1:13-16; 12:12-13). Paul wants the Corinthians and us to know that just as there can be no turning back to our past lives and ways, we must not let discontent with being tested overtake us. For no test comes our way that is beyond what others have had to face. The power to endure is available, if we just trust in God.

It should be noted that the word "*peirasmos*," translated in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible as "*testing*" and as "*temptation*" in the King James Version, actually has a broader meaning than our English words "test" or "temptation." In the Greek, the meaning is inclusive of both. It includes the idea of (1) a "*time of testing*" or "*time of trial*," during which one's faith, character, or virtue is proven, and (2) the idea of being "*tempted to sin*." And it is the same Greek word used in 1 Peter 4:12-13: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed."

African American young adults in the twenty-first century church need to hear this today, just as much as the church in Corinth did two millennia ago. The world has changed dramatically since the times of the Corinthians, and even since the time of contemporary elder generations. But two things have not changed. One, each generation of believers is tested. Two, God remains faithful to believers. Even in this complex, post-modern, and post-civil rights world, young adults can be assured that they will be tested in these uncommon times, but more importantly, God promises to be with them every step of the way. If temptation is near, Paul tells us, so is God! When we are

tempted, God is with us and God will help us. This is no small fact. God will provide a way out not by having us avoid temptation, but by helping us meet it successfully, and stand firm under it.

Celebration

God is faithful and will not let us be tested (or tempted) beyond our powers of endurance. This points young adults in two directions, like a signpost at a crossroads. On the one hand, it points to the tests and challenges to be endured in a world filled with chaos and confusion. On the other hand, it points them to the divine power, support, and presence of the Spirit of God. It reminds them that no matter what, they serve a faithful God, and they can rest assured that when the going gets tough, interior spiritual resources are available to appropriate, and with the appropriation, victory is gained. The one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion through Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6)! God gave them, and all of us, an *extremely powerful* source of encouragement for times of fiery trial! This is our comfort, this provides us courage; this is reason to celebrate our Great God!

III. Descriptive Details

The descriptive details evoked by this passage include:

Sounds: The sounds of college students in a classroom dialoguing about a controversial issue that challenges a believer’s faith; young adults dialoguing about how to rear their children; conversations by older adults about the involvement of young adults in the church; young adults singing; a young adult preaching; a young adult talking to a potential employer;

Sights: Young adults graduating college; young adults at work; young adults attending the funeral of other young adults; young adults upset at the lack of inclusion in their church; young adults seeking new church homes, young adults with their hands raised in praise; and

Emotions: Young adults who are excited by what their future holds; young adults who are frightened by what their future holds; young adults who feel burdened by the weight of work, family, and the state of the world; and young adults who are determined to persevere in Jesus’ name.

IV. Additional Suggestions for Preachers and Teachers

Gathering Words (Based on Psalm 100)

Leader: Let us enter God’s presence with thanksgiving and into God’s courts with praise. Make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth.

People: **Let us worship the Lord with gladness, and come into God’s presence with singing.**

Leader: O, magnify the Lord with me.

People: Let us bless the Lord at all times. God's praises will continuously be in our mouths.

Leader: It is good to give thanks to the Lord; to sing praises to the Most High and declare God's steadfast love in the morning.

People: Bless the Lord O my Soul and all that is within me. Bless God's Holy Name.

A Call To Worship: For Times of Testing (Responsive Reading)
(Based on Psalm 46)

Leader: As the earth changes and the mountains shake, and we're tested on every side

People: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Leader: Though rivers of our lives rage and overflow their banks, we remember,

People: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Leader: When we're pushed down, pushed aside, misunderstood, or mistreated, we take comfort in knowing.

People: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Leader: No matter what the test, the Lord of hosts is with us;

People: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

All: God, you alone are our refuge; you alone are our strength.
We look to you for the victory in these times of tests and trials.
Be with us now in our worship, and use us, we pray, so that all that we say and do will glorify you and benefit all of your people. This we pray, in Jesus' name.
Amen.

A Prayer
Give Us Your Wisdom to Endure When We Are Tested

Give us wisdom – your wisdom, Lord – to endure when we're tested.
Teach us, Lord, when to speak and when to be silent,
Instruct us when to ignore and when to be attentive,
Help us know when to wait quietly and when to move with quickness!
And when the Tempter comes, Lord, help us to be discerning
To understand what's important and what is merely a distraction
from your presence in our lives and your plan for our lives.
When we're tried, tested, and faced with temptation,

help us, dear Lord, to cultivate God-confidence. Amen.

More Worship Ideas

- Worship by doing. Incorporate outreach to the community after your worship service. Do a parks or neighborhood cleanup project or sign up to participate in a Habitat for Humanity event on Sunday afternoon or the Saturday before.
- Have a concert or art show with local artists as part of the worship event or after it.
- Include intergenerational elements and cultural elements that celebrate the wide age range of young adults (college age (18–22), young singles, married couples) through dance, step, contemporary gospel, rap, etc.)
- Use PowerPoint during the sermon, and have a children’s moment for young parents with children.
- Worship in non-typical formations, like praying or singing in a circle at the end of service.
- Incorporate thought-provoking images and quotes in your bulletin.
- Do a tag-team message (sermon or reading) featuring a young adult and a senior citizen, or a newlywed couple and long-married couple, etc.
- Mainly feature young adults throughout the service.

Note

1. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/160340/standard-living-optimism-five-year-high.aspx>.