

Pastor Kim's Lenten devotional April 8, 2020

"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." (1 Corinthians 10:13)

I have heard this verse interpreted in many ways, and believe that right now is a good time to lay it out a bit more clearly so that we do not misunderstand. In these 2020 days of Holy Week, we are challenged, to put it mildly, to maintain something that looks like normal. Some aim for survival. Others aim for keeping everything as it always is. Others shut down entirely. Or somewhere in between these.

The reality is that we ALL experience testing, not just in this current crisis, but in each day. None of us can say that we are alone in being tested, or experiencing trials. It is disappointing when one of us thinks or says that their testing/trials are the worst – it disallows the experiences of everyone else. ALL experience testing, Paul writes.

The next phrase is absolutely critical and is absolutely essential to us. If we hope to thrive, if we hope to have fullness of life, if we hope to overcome with Christ, we MUST hold on tight to this truth "GOD IS FAITHFUL." God is faithful whether we are faithful or not. God is faithful if we are paying attention or not. God is faithful.

We then read these words "he [God] will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way you so that you may be able to endure it." And so many of us read this and believe it means that we should be able to handle all of our life situations on our own, because, after all, scripture says that we will not be tested beyond our strength, so we should be able to handle it, right?

NO. Not right! If that is the truth, then by far, we are abject failures and this verse condemns rather than gives hope, because there are so many aspects of our lives in which we cannot stand on our own. So how about if we read it like this: God is faithful, and every time we are tested beyond our strength, beyond our ability to withstand, God stands not only with us, but for us. God holds us up in those moments we cannot stand, much less withstand.

And the truth is that we all are tested beyond our ability to withstand on our own! But here is the awesome promise of this passage – God is faithful and is standing with us, holding us, defending us, giving us not just a way out, but a way out that brings us hope and life and peace and joy!

As I write these words, I am listening to a Casting Crowns song, *Praise You in the Storm*. Here is a link so that you can listen for yourself: https://youtu.be/EjZBZv_771o

Some of the lyrics:

I was sure by now, God you would have reached down and wiped our tears away,

Stepped in and saved the day.
But once again, I say amen That it's still raining
As the thunder rolls
I barely hear your whisper through the rain "I'm with you"
And as your mercy falls I raise my hands and praise
The God who gives and takes away

And I'll praise you in this storm And I will lift my hands
That you are who you are No matter where I am
And every tear I've cried You hold in your hand
You never left my side And though my heart is torn
I will praise you in this storm

I remember when I stumbled in the wind You heard my cry you raised me up again
My strength is almost gone how can I carry on If I can't find you
As the thunder rolls I barely hear you whisper through the rain I'm with you
And as your mercy falls I raise my hands and praise
The God who gives and takes away

In this tremendous storm – as someone put it, the slowest moving hurricane in the history of the world – we are NOT ALONE. Every time we feel like we cannot take any more – any more isolation, any more lack, any more bad news, any more political fighting over how we are going to handle this as a nation and a world, any more... - we have the most amazing reminder that gives us all we need: WE ARE NOT ALONE. God is holding us, carrying us through it all.

So in this very weird Holy Week 2020, in our final Wednesday worship time before we walk with the Christ through the trial, crucifixion, death and resurrection, let us remember that one outcome of it is that we have God With Us – Emmanuel – come to save, set free, and carry through.

In all of this God is with us. Thanks be to God for carrying us through. Thanks be to God that we have life and hope and joy and peace in God's presence. And that because we have God's presence, we can, with the help of God, withstand!

Amen.