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Maundy Thursday: 1 Corinthians 10:1-22 & John 13:21-38

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Alastair Roberts

The example of Israel in the wilderness. A new commandment.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

1 Corinthians 10, verses 1-22 Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were, as it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. We must not indulge in sexual immorality, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.

We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 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. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

I speak as to sensible people. Judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

Consider the people of Israel, are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then, that food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons, and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons.

You cannot partake of the table of the Lord, and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? Although it is easy to miss when we read the chapters as detached units, 1 Corinthians 10 continues the argument that has been going on since chapter 8 of Corinthians. This is all Paul's discussion of eating food sacrificed to idols, and that might surprise us when we read these verses ahead, but yet as we look back it should make more sense.

It is in the background of the beginning of the chapter, and will come back to the foreground by the end. Paul has just been talking about his own example, his example in earning his own keep rather than placing a burden upon the Corinthians, as he was entitled to do. Now it seems Paul's argument takes a sharp turn and goes into seemingly unrelated territory.

He talks about the experience of Israel in the wilderness. He begins by talking about all our fathers. The story of Israel is the church.

He's writing this to Gentiles in Corinth, not just to Jews. All of our fathers were under the cloud. All of them passed through the sea.

The cloud was God's visible presence with them. The pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night. The sea was the Red Sea through which they passed and were delivered from the Egyptians.

They were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. Baptism into Moses is a strange way of talking about the Red Sea, yet Paul seems to be using this in a rather strong sense. What could he mean by baptism into Moses? If we look at the beginning of the story of Exodus, Moses himself is drawn out of the water.

He's named for being drawn out of the water. He's drawn out from among the reeds, and Israel is later drawn out from the reed sea. His deliverance is connected with his birth narrative, and Israel is brought out of the sea as part of its event of birth, as the firstborn

of the Lord.

What happens first to Moses happens to his people. In the crossing of the Red Sea, the people are brought into Moses' experience, the experience that Moses had before them. Moses had previously gone to Mount Sinai, experienced and met with the Lord there, and then he's going to lead the flock of the people to the mountain, and then he's going to meet with the Lord there again.

They're going to enter into his experience. In the same way, when we are baptized, we are baptized into Christ. His story becomes our story.

We are baptized into his baptism in the Jordan, declared to be God's beloved sons and daughters, set apart for mission. We are baptized into the baptism of his death. We are buried with him in order that we might be raised with him in the future.

His spirit baptizes the church at Pentecost, so that as we are baptized with his spirit, we can share in the blessings of his ascension. In the crossing of the Red Sea, Israel also came under the leadership of Moses in a new way. At the end of chapter 14 of Exodus, we're told that they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

That was the consequence of the experience of the Red Sea, and Moses here is implicitly functioning as a Christ figure, as a type of Christ to come. They were baptized into Moses. They also ate the same spiritual food, referring to the manna.

In speaking of spiritual food, Paul might have in mind things such as Psalm 78 verses 23 to 25. Yet he commanded the skies above and opened the doors of heaven, and he rained down on the manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven. Man ate of the bread of the angels, he sent them food in abundance.

They also drank the same spiritual drink. Here he's referring to the water from the rock mentioned in Exodus chapter 17 and Numbers chapter 20. And the rock that followed them, he says, was Christ.

Now this is a very strange claim to make. In this passage, Paul might be alluding to intertestamental traditions of reading the story of the Exodus and joining some of the dots and filling in some of the gaps. Yet when we look at the original text, there are legitimate connections to make.

The Lord is described as the rock. In the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 24, this language occurs on several occasions. The rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice, a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.

Verse 4. But Joshua grew fat and kicked, you grew fat, stout and sleek. Then he forgot God, who made him, and scoffed at the rock of his salvation. Verse 15.

You were unmindful of the rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth. Verse 18. How could one have chased a thousand, and two have put ten thousand to flight, unless their rock had sold them, and the Lord had given them up? For their rock is not as our rock, our enemies are by themselves.

Verses 30 to 31. In the original account of striking the rock, the Lord is associated with the rock in a very powerful way. In Exodus chapter 17, verses 5 to 7. 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 Masa Ameribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, Is the Lord among us or not? Putting these things together, it is not inappropriate to speak of the rock that followed them. In Numbers chapter 20, there is again the rock that is struck, albeit now in a different location.

Rather than thinking of a literal rock that's moving around, we should think about the Lord as symbolically associated with the rock, communicating himself to his people at very specific rocks that all represent him as the one rock. What is the point of all of this section? Paul is telling the story of Israel in a way that shows clear connections between their story and the story of the church at Corinth. The children of Israel had a baptism, the baptism of the crossing of the Red Sea.

They had the presence of the Spirit in the cloud that accompanied and led them, and they had the supper in the spiritual food that they ate of the manna, and the spiritual drink of the rock. Paul is showing deep correspondences between events across history here, and he's making a strong claim. He's not merely drawing parallels in form between an Old Testament fleshly deliverance and a New Testament spiritual deliverance.

He's making a far stronger claim than that. He's arguing that the Old Testament deliverance was a spiritual deliverance. The problem, however, was that the people were fleshly.

If the Corinthians think of themselves as spiritual people, they should learn a lesson or two from the Israelites, who had all these spiritual blessings and yet made nothing of them. Now, from enumerating the spiritual blessings received by the Israelites, Paul turns to speak of the ways in which they failed. They sinned with the golden calf.

The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play in Exodus chapter 32. They sinned with Baal of Peor in Numbers chapter 25, and a very great number of them died. There were fiery serpents in Numbers chapter 21, and they put Christ to the test.

This is perhaps one of the more arresting claims made here. They weren't just testing the Lord, they were testing Christ himself. The Corinthians might think themselves spiritually above the Israelites, but yet the Old Testament Israelites had Christ in their midst too.

Christ was the angel that led them on the way. Paul also refers to the grumbling of the people. This could refer to a number of different events, such as the terrible litany of events of grumbling that we have in Numbers chapter 11 and following.

Many of those who grumbled were destroyed by the destroyer. The destroyer is referred to in Exodus chapter 12 verse 23 as the one who slew the firstborn of Israel in the Passover. And all of this is an example for us.

The connections between the two stories, the fact that Christ was with them, the Spirit was with them, they had all these spiritual blessings, sets them up as examples that we can learn from. In this case as cautionary examples. There is a similarity between the Corinthian situation and that of the wilderness generation.

They are both awaiting salvation. In the new covenant, Christ has brought his people out, but he has not yet brought them in. Christ has inaugurated the last days, but the Corinthians must faithfully follow him into the promised land of the age to come.

And they must beware of being presumptuous or overconfident. Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. The Corinthians are acting as if they reign like kings already, as if they had already attained all these blessings, as if they had already arrived at their destination.

But they are compromising in exactly the same areas as the Israelites in the wilderness. They're compromising with sexual immorality, they're desiring evil, they're testing Christ by their disobedience, they're grumbling and engaging in dissension, and they're compromising with idolatry. God can test his people, but when he does, he provides ways of escape and doesn't overwhelm them.

Being tested by God does not pose the same sorts of dangers as testing God does. When God tests us, he does not test us to destroy us, but to prove us, to bring us into a greater maturity and into a fuller possession of his good gifts. Having retold the story of Israel in the wilderness in this way, Paul brings his argument back to its primary point in verses 14 to 22.

He presents three different types of meal in parallel. The Lord's Supper, Jewish sacrificial meals, and pagan sacrificial meals. And all of these meals are about forging bonds of participation.

The celebration of the Lord's Supper is a participation in the body and blood of Christ. It's a means by which we are made one with him and with each other in his body. The

celebration of the sacrificial meals of Israel was a way of participating in the sacrifice of the altar and enjoying fellowship with God.

Paul, while he does not believe that the idols are anything, the idols aren't real gods. There is only one true God and all other so-called gods are either imaginary or created beings. However, even though the idols aren't real gods, this doesn't mean that there is nothing there at all.

Rather, the pagans are sacrificing to demons. They are participating in the table of the devil himself. Here Paul is alluding once again to the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 32.

Here to verses 16 and 17. They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations they provoked him to anger. They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently whom your fathers had never dreaded.

This clinches Paul's point. In referring to this, the story of Israel that he has just retold makes a lot more sense. Israel had all these spiritual blessings but they entered into participation with false gods and suffered as a result.

And the proud Corinthians, who despite all their boasts have a lot more in common with the children of Israel than they might suppose, are in very great danger of doing the same thing. He concludes this section by asking, are we stronger than he? You Corinthians, you think that you are strong. You think that you can eat of the food of idol feasts with impunity.

But yet, are you stronger than God? The God who judged Israel for the very same thing? Seen in this light, the supposed strength of the Corinthians is ridiculous. Why does Paul argue as he does? Why does he present this argument, which seems to be the clincher at this point, rather than leading with it in chapter 8? Partly because idol food could be encountered in a number of different contexts. Idol food could be encountered in the meat market where you might eat food that had previously been part of a pagan ritual.

Idol food could also be encountered in an actual pagan celebration or in a meal dedicated to some idol. It seems as though the so-called strong Corinthians were involved in both practices and Paul speaks in different ways to these different situations. A question to consider, how might Paul's use of the example of Israel in this chapter be instructive for us in our reading of the Old Testament? John chapter 13 verses 21 to 38.

After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit and testified, truly, truly I say to you, one of you will betray me. The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus' side.

So Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So that disciple,

leaning back against Jesus, said to him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, it is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it. So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.

Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, what you are going to do, do quickly. Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him.

Some thought that because Judas had the money bag, Jesus was telling him, buy what we need for the feast, or that he should give something to the poor. So after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out, and it was night. When he had gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.

If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, where I am going, you cannot come.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. Simon Peter said to him, Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered him, where I am going, you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.

Peter said to him, Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you. Jesus answered, will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times. The end of John chapter 13 is set at the Last Supper, in the final hours prior to Jesus' capture.

We are told that Jesus was troubled in his spirit. A similar expression was used a chapter earlier, in John chapter 12 verse 27. Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.

The coming of the long-awaited hour is a theme that runs throughout the Gospel of John. The hour is the hour of Christ's suffering and his death. It is also paradoxically the hour of his glorification.

Nevertheless, it is a time of great anguish, and the troubling of spirit that Jesus experiences here is similar to that which is described in the Synoptic Gospels in the context of Gethsemane. Jesus makes a solemn statement about the fact that one of the twelve will betray him. The disciples, uncertain about what he might mean, inquire among themselves, and Simon Peter inquires of the disciple closest to Jesus, the disciple whom Jesus loves, who is reclining in Jesus' bosom.

This description of the beloved disciple, the author of the Gospel of John, is one that should remind us of chapter 1 verse 18, where the word is described as being in the bosom of the Father. In both cases we see that a witness is qualified for their witness-

bearing by virtue of their intimate relationship with the one to whom they bear witness. Chapter 13 verse 2 declared that Satan had put the plan to betray Christ in the heart of Judas, and now in verse 27 he entered into Judas personally.

This occurred after Jesus gave Judas the morsel. In Romans chapter 12 verse 20, Paul uses a related verb to the noun that John uses here for morsel to describe the way that we should give something to a hungry enemy to eat. Jesus gives a morsel to his enemy at this point, and after he has given that morsel, Satan enters into Judas, and Judas goes out.

There is a symbolic power to this exchange, beyond the fact that it reveals Christ's knowledge of his betrayer. This is a final act of grace of Christ to Judas, is a final opportunity for Judas to draw back from his act. The words that follow are incredibly powerful, and illustrate something of the ability of the gospel writers to establish the emotional tone and theological force of a scene with the greatest economy of details.

And it was night. Throughout the scripture, mentions of the rising or the setting of the sun are seldom purely incidental. We might think of the rising of the sun as Jacob limps away from the ford of the Jabbok, or the rising of the sun after the crossing of the Red Sea, and the waters coming back over the Egyptians.

Or perhaps we might think about the sun setting upon Sodom, as the angels meet Lot in the gate. In the gospel of John, the period of darkness that begins here lasts until the discovery of the resurrection in chapter 20. The gospel of John explores themes of darkness and light throughout.

Christ is the light that has entered into the world. In John chapter 9 verses 4 to 5, we have an example of this. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day.

Night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. The sun of righteousness is now going to be eclipsed in death, before rising again on Easter morning, the dawning of a new day.

Judas goes out into the darkness of the night, while the rest of the company remains in the light of Jesus' presence. In giving the morsel to Judas, and instructing him to do what he is about to do quickly, Jesus actively consents to and precipitates the events that will lead up to his capture and his crucifixion. The giving of the morsel and the departure of Judas is something of a watershed.

A chapter earlier, a similar watershed moment occurred as the Greeks came to see Jesus. John chapter 12 verse 23, and Jesus answered them, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. And in verse 27 to 32 of that chapter, now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.

Father glorify your name. Then a voice came from heaven, I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again. The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered.

Others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus answered, this voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world.

Now will the ruler of this world be cast out, and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. This statement about the glorification of the Son of Man is also noteworthy in the fact that it comes in the second half of the book which has been called the book of glory and represents one of the only references to the Son of Man within this section. The glorification of the Son of Man looks back to Daniel chapter 7 where the Son of Man comes to receive the kingdom from the ancient of days on the clouds of heaven.

The glorification is spoken of as something that has already occurred and as something that will occur. In some sense it has already definitively taken place, in another it still awaits its outworking. Earlier in John chapter 7 verses 33 to 36, Jesus had spoken to the Jews concerning his departure.

Jesus then said, I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me, and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.

The Jews said to one another, where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What does he mean by saying you will seek me and you will not find me and where I am you cannot come? In this chapter Jesus refers back to that earlier conversation and makes a similar statement to his own disciples. He follows this by teaching them what he calls a new commandment. The new commandment that they love each other as Christ has loved them has a paradoxical character to it.

On the one hand such a commandment to love does not seem to say anything that we do not encounter in the Old Testament itself. On the other hand however it is described as a new commandment. The paradoxical character of this commandment is even more clearly seen in 1 John chapter 2 verses 7 to 8. Beloved I am writing you no new commandment but an old commandment that you had from the beginning.

The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time it is a new commandment that I am writing to you which is true in him and in you because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. And then in 2 John verses 5 and 6. And now I ask you dear lady not as though I were writing you a new commandment but the one we have had from the beginning that we love one another and this is love that we walk according to his commandments.

This is the commandment just as you have heard from the beginning so that you should walk in it. We find a related statement in John chapter 15 verses 9 to 10. As the father

has loved me so have I loved you abide in my love.

If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love just as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love. How ought we to understand this? It seems to me that it is especially important that this love is demonstrated by Christ himself. We love as he has loved us.

The former commandment to love which summed up and fulfilled the law could summarize the commandments but it had not been concretely realized in history in the way that the commandment to love is realized in the person of Christ and his sacrifice. In the new covenant love is not just the overriding principle of proper behavior in relationship to God and neighbor. Love is witnessed in the person of Jesus Christ and in his redemptive action and the love that is witnessed is the love of God himself.

As we receive the love of God in Christ we should express that love to others as we love them as he loved us. Love then is not just an ethical principle. It is a fact and reality of history known in the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

As we live out of this reality we are fulfilling the new commandment in which all of the old commandments are fulfilled and brought to their proper telos in the new covenant writing the law of God upon the hearts of a people that now embody love. Jesus had given the example of love earlier in this chapter he played out the sacrificial action that he would perform on the cross in washing his disciples feet and drying them. That is the example that we should follow and it will be the means by which people know that we are his disciples.

It should mark us out rendering us recognizable as the true disciples of Christ. Picking up on Jesus' statement in verse 33 Simon Peter asks him where he is going and then asks why he cannot follow him at this point in time. He's already prepared to die for him.

In response Jesus foretells Peter's threefold denial of him. The crowing of the rooster perhaps related to Peter's own boastfulness will serve as the sign that alerts Peter to the fulfillment of this prophecy. As we see within this passage Jesus is neither blindsided by Judas' betrayal or by Peter's denial.

He predicts both of them. He is the master of his destiny not the mere victim of events. This helps us in part to understand the paradox of the way in which Christ's death in the Gospel of John can also be seen as Christ's act by which he is raised up, an event of glorification.

A question to consider. Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial at the end of this chapter might recall the earlier exchange with Peter in chapter 13 of John where Peter initially refused to have Jesus wash his feet. How do these conversations between Jesus and Peter help us better to understand the significance of the cross and how the disciples stand relative

to it?