LENT: WILDERNESS

Match 15, 2026

Preaching: Michael Swartzentruber, Senior Minister

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

I do not want you to be unaware,
brothers and sisters, that our ancestors
were all under the cloud, and all
passed through the sea, [2]and all were
baptized into Moses in the cloud and
in the sea, [3]and all ate the same
spiritual food, [4]and all drank the same
spiritual drink. For they drank from the
spiritual rock that followed them, and
the rock was Christ. [5]Nevertheless, God
was not pleased with most of them,
and they were struck down in the
wilderness.

6 Now these things occurred as
examples for us, so that we might not
desire evil as they did. [7]Do not become
idolaters as some of them did; as it is
written, 'The people sat down to eat
and drink, and they rose up to play.'
[8]We must not indulge in sexual
immorality as some of them did, and
twenty-three thousand fell in a single
day. [9]We must not put Christ* to the
test, as some of them did, and were
destroyed by serpents. [10]And do not
complain as some of them did, and
were destroyed by the destroyer.
[11]These things happened to them to
serve as an example, and they were
written down to instruct us, on whom
the ends of the ages have come. [12]So if
you think you are standing, watch out
that you do not fall. [13]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.

*See "**Context Note**" on next page.*

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. Read the passage slowly. Then take a deep breath and read it again. What word, phrase, or image stands out to you?

2. The season of Lent is often about getting honest and penitent about the things that tempt us–even the idols we've come to worship (often without realizing

it). Indeed, even the Israelites who had Moses, God leading them in a cloud, and manna from heaven still strayed (see verse 2). What are some things that have become like idols in the 21st century? What are ways you've found to work through temptation?

3. As verse 12 might imply, why might those who think they are impervious to temptation be the ones Paul cautions most? How do you cultivate humility not to overestimate your abilities?

4. Have you ever heard (or thought yourself), "God won't give you more than you can handle"? Some trace that Christian cliche to this passage–do you see the verse? What's been your experience with this kind of spiritual advice? Why might it not be helpful? What might it miss about this verse, the human condition, or about God?

5. Paul draws on the Exodus in many ways in this passage: from the Wilderness journey of the Israelites to the closing verse about God helping people find "a way out" of the temptations and trials (*ex-odos* in Greek is literally, "the way out").

    a. How can a Christ-like community be one "way out" for someone who is overcome by difficulties or temptation?

    b. How does a Christ-like community provide strength, vision, accountability, and renewal for people beyond themselves?

    c. How do you engage in spiritual community and lean on spiritual resources in the face of trials and temptations?

CONTEXT NOTE

In this letter, Paul is concerned with how Christians relate to the wider community and culture they are a part of. Paul compares the early church to the Israelites wandering in the wilderness–tempted to stray from the way of God. Paul intends for the exodus/wilderness stories of scripture to be wisdom that the church in Corinth can learn from. There were Greek temples seemingly on every corner of the streets, and so it was quite possible that food purchased at a market could have been consecrated at a temple altar before later being sold. In addition, temples like the one dedicated to Aphrodite were described as sites of "sexual immorality" (ie, temple prostitution: enslaved or exploited people used sexually by temple-goers). These activities were all things some of the Corinthian Christians may have done before they came to faith in Christ. Now, when invited by a friend to dinner, they are wondering if they can eat food that was blessed and consecrated to the city gods, especially since–from a Christian perspective–these gods are fake (unreal). Paul goes on to say: "everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial" (1 Cor. 10:23).