

“The Reality Check”

Text: 1 Corinthians 10:12-17

Dear Fellow Christians: You don't hear much about “reality checks” anymore. I used to hear that phrase all the time. I no longer do. Maybe there's a cool new term for it now of which I am yet unaware. I hope so, because we need them now more than ever. Our society has devolved into a surreal Lalaland of make-believe – a perpetual story-hour where truth and reality are whatever you want them to be. The immature have always been that way, but that's when and where the old *reality check* worked its magic. Billy decided that he didn't need parental rules and supervision at the ripe old age of 12, and that he would be just fine on his own – he could “take care of himself.” So he packed up his belongings (actually, the stuff that his parents had bought for him) along with several participation trophies that bore witness to his talent, and set out. His reality check came about sundown when he discovered that the real world was cold, dark, scary and unaccommodating. Food didn't just appear on tables in the real world and no one seemed to know or care how very special he was. He decided to give his parents another chance. Ah, the magic and power of the reality check.

My fear is that we don't hear much at all about reality checks today because our society is struggling mightily to pretend they are obsolete and unnecessary – even counterproductive and cruel. How can dreamers dream if others insist on draping them with the cold, wet blanket of reality? How can they acquire an absolutely worthless degree (one that benefits no one on planet earth) if they have to *pay* for it? How can they be multi-millionaire super-star athletes if others demand that they have talent and work hard? Reality checks used to fix this silliness, but our society seems to have misplaced them.

Thankfully, our God did not. He introduces them into our lives often, and in a variety of different ways. Mature Christians love him for it, in large part because there really is nothing more real than reality.

This morning we are going to examine several of those reality checks that our God graciously introduces into our lives – at times, daily. The text on which we will base our study is found in Paul's First (recorded) Letter to the Corinthians, the Tenth Chapter:

ESV(1 Corinthians 10:12-17) *Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵ I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶ 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? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

This is God's Word. Humbly asking our God to bless us through our study of His Word, so we pray, ***“Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.”*** Amen.

One of the most exciting aspects of the Christian faith comes with the realization that our lives are guided by the unseen hand of our God. In the 31st Psalm, David wrote these simple, powerful words: ***“My times are in your hand.”*** That passage is especially comforting when God determines that the time of grace of one of his loved ones has come to an end. Death is the ultimate reality check. It serves as a constant reminder that there is an immutable end to this life. Certainly that is fitting, but it is also both appropriate and exhilarating to hear and apply those words to every moment of our earthly walk. Our God does not just determine when we die; he directs our entire lives with an unseen and yet all-powerful hand.

Think about it. What in life could be more moving, more thrilling, more comforting than to know that God is in control? Throughout the pages of Holy Scripture we are assured in nearly every imaginable way that our God is intimately connected to us – living within us, in fact – and actually knows us better than we know ourselves. ***“The very hairs of our heads are numbered.”***

The godless hear such things and tremble, for the idea that God sees through their outward façade and knows their sin is a terror to them. Christians, on the other hand, hear this as the very best possible news. How trilling to be able simply to enjoy the ride that is life under God's all-powerful protection and guidance. Trusting our God through life not only removes fear, it allows us to live in (and actually appreciate) the moment. This is both good and necessary, since as you grow older you come to recognize more and more that so many of the great and pivotal moments in life – the “times of your life” – tend to come and go without our recognizing their importance. We miss the here and now because we are too distracted, always looking for what's next, never what is. “The Good Old Days” never seemed to be lived, only remembered.

God knows this about us, which is why he often sends his special reality checks to make us stop and refocus, to look around and appreciate the reality of what is, both good and bad. One of those divine reality checks is found in the first verse of our text for this evening: ***Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.***

Christians are only strong ***“in the Lord,”*** not in themselves. Imagining that we can coast into eternity on our own strength and spiritual reserves is roughly akin to an airline pilot shutting off his engines because he feels he is already flying high enough and fast enough. As it is an immutable reality that airplanes don't float, so also it is an immutable reality that saving faith can be abused, degraded, and finally lost. The devil doesn't continually tempt God's children just to create chaos and mayhem on earth. His purpose represents an actual goal – our eternal destruction through the loss of our Christian faith. It's just pure foolishness to neglect the single most important aspect of our existence, which is our relationship with our Savior. Our text assures us that our loving God ***“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,”*** but how infinitely foolish to cut ourselves off from the source of power he has given us to bring about that escape, which is his Word.

The first reality check that God therefore offers us in our text is this: *Saving faith can be lost, and the most corrosive enemy of faith is sin.*

The whole topic of sin confuses even many Christians. We need to spend very little time on the *world's* view of sin. Their solution to sin is to deny it altogether, to pretend that sin is not sin. Sin is, they opine, a construct of man – along with the ideas of “god” and religion. All, in their view, were created by men to control or manipulate other men. They were created to frighten others into doing what they are told. Their plan, in other words, is to calm their troubled hearts by just ignoring the *reality* of sin, all while congratulating themselves for their keen intellect and wisdom.

Knowing, as he does, all things, God provided a special, daily reality check in the Prayer that Jesus himself delivered to us: ***“And forgive us our trespasses.”*** In this petition our Savior first reminds us of the *reality* of sin itself. It would be nonsensical for Jesus to teach us to repent of that which didn't exist. Sin is real, and its danger is real.

Yet here is where the confusion comes for many Christians. How do we reconcile this ***“forgive us our trespasses”*** with the cross of Good Friday and the Savior's declaration that ***“It is finished!”***? Do my sins accumulate moment by moment on God's divine ledger, only to be removed from my account if or when I ask him to do so? Am I, in other words, saved not just by faith in what Jesus did on the cross but also by what I must do by confessing? How can we then say that we are saved by *faith alone* in Jesus Christ if there is something, anything at all, that I must add? What confidence could anyone ever then have that they have confessed, and then finally received forgiveness for, the very last sin, for even one unforgiven sin can and will bar the door to heaven?

The *reality* is that our Savior meant exactly what he said on the cross. Sin is real, but so is the payment Jesus made for every single one of those sins. That forgiveness he earned by sacrificing his perfect life on Good Friday is full and complete, and it is our own personal possession, full and complete, every moment that faith resides in our hearts. That's the reality that God himself communicated to us with those simple, beautiful words: ***“And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.”*** ^{ESV} (Romans 4:5) “Righteous” is the very opposite of sinful. They are also therefore mutually exclusive. If you are righteous, you have no sin. If you have sin, you are not righteous. This passage teaches therefore us that God declares us to be not guilty of sin (righteous) through faith alone in the sacrifice of his Son.

But why then did Jesus teach us to pray ***“forgives us our trespasses”*** if we are counted righteous (sinless) through faith alone in him?

The 5th Petition (***“and forgive us our trespasses”***) is one of God's great reality checks. Ask yourself this: *How or what do I feel when I pray this prayer? What, in other words, does this petition force me to do?* Two things. It forces me first to acknowledge the sins that I daily commit, but then it also forces me back to Jesus and the cross, where that debt too was paid. Always and only to Jesus.

Human beings have a terrible habit of forgetting and pretending. We can actually *forget* that we are sinners (and in how many different ways we sin) and we can *pretend* that sin poses no danger to our eternal souls and that the payment for my sin was inconsequential. Satan knows that he can never successfully attack God's declaration

of sins forgiven. That reality is established and immovable – for it was declared to be true by God himself. Satan’s only hope is to entice us to reject Christ’s payment as our own, and thereby to forfeit the only viable solution for our sin problem. To bring about that rejection, Satan would convince us that we have no sin, and therefore need no Savior, or that we must do our part before God will justify us. What he absolutely cannot tolerate is Christians *“fleeing for refuge to God’s infinite mercy”* in Jesus Christ. And yet this is exactly what God accomplishes for us in the 5th Petition of our Lord’s Prayer. It forces us to stop, to consider the *reality* of both our sin and therefore also of the need for forgiveness, and then directs us back inexorably to the One who has already earned that forgiveness. It teaches us that our sin is real, but just as real is the forgiveness that is ours through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Our God also knows that sinful human beings crave the tangible over the conceptual; that is, we prefer (are more comfortable with) what our senses tell us over what our minds can only conceptualize. God in his mercy therefore connected his sacraments to readily available physical elements – water in baptism and bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper. Today we witness the reality of both in action, and here too we recognize more of God’s reality checks. In baptism we are reminded of the reality of sin, also in little children, and of God’s power to create saving faith in those same little ones. In our text we read: ***“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?”*** This passage makes absolutely no sense for those who deny the Real Presence in the sacrament – who deny that together with the bread and the wine we here receive Christ’s true body and blood. We cannot “participate” with that which is not present. Do we need this reminder? Judge for yourself how easy it is to lose sight of this amazing truth each time you commune. This passage snaps us back to the reality of what is actually taking place when we commune – the reception of the very body and blood that was sacrificed 2000 years ago as the full and complete payment for our sins. It also accomplishes the same thing that we experience in the 5th Petition: it drives us back to Jesus Christ and his sin-payment as our only hope and consolation. It drives us back both to the reality of our sin *and* to the reality that God has forgiven that sin on the basis of the sacrifice of Christ’s body and blood on the Cross.

What true, *real* comfort and peace is here offered. My sin does not accumulate. Forgiveness is mine through faith alone in the One who has already paid for that sin. Every. Single. Sin. That’s what Jesus told us to remember every time we commune – that he already paid for my sin by sacrificing the very body and blood he is giving me in the sacrament. He

gives us that forgiveness by creating saving faith in baptism, and then strengthens that faith in Holy Communion. Rage against this reality as he will, Satan is powerless to destroy this or any other truth that God himself has declared. Amen.

ESV **Acts 5:12, 17-32** Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. ¹⁷ ¶ But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy ¹⁸ they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ²⁰ "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." ²¹ ¶ And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council and all the senate of the people of Israel and sent to the prison to have them brought. ²² But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, ²³ "We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside." ²⁴ Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. ²⁵ And someone came and told them, "Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people." ²⁶ Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. ²⁷ ¶ And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸ saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

ESV **Revelation 1:4-8** John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, ⁵ ¶ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. ⁷ Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. ⁸ ¶ "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

ESV **1 Corinthians 10:12-17** Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵ I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶ 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? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.



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The Sunday after Easter – April 24, 2022

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 210 (Red Hymnal)

"The Strife Is O'er, the Battle Done"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Acts 5:12, 17-32) The good news of the empty tomb, together with what Christ's resurrection means to every human soul, was never meant to be hoarded or hidden. Our first lesson this morning gives us an example of the sort of boldness that our God wants to see in those he has commissioned to spread the gospel. This reading should also remind us that the One whose work we seek to carry out is the One that will both provide for and protect his faithful servants.

Psalm 66 (Page 37) (Brown Hymnal)

The Second Lesson: (Revelation 1:4-8) John saw a vision of things to come. Many of these signs or events have already come to pass. At least one remains - the return of our Lord on the Last Day. May God the Holy Spirit keep us focused on that great day, and continually remind us to work tirelessly to share the gospel while there is still time. While that day will be amazing beyond compare for God's children, not so for those who reject Jesus Christ as their Savior. God grant us love for souls.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – revised (On Screens only)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 196 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"I Am Content, My Jesus Liveth Still"

The Sermon – Text: 1 Corinthians 10:12-17 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Reality Check"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Baptism Hymn – 753 (Brown Hymnal)

The Baptism of Mattias Redento Meyer

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 163 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"The Death of Jesus Christ, Our Lord"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 207 (Stanzas 1-2) Red Hymnal)

"Like the Golden Sun Ascending"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion** – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (35) Average (30) Friday (20)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Mon-Wed	-9:00 a.m.	– Board Meetings in Eau Claire
Wednesday	(No Midweek Classes)	
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Mark Tiefel has accepted the call to Peace Thru Christ of Middleton. Pastor Michael Wilke is considering the call to Immanuel of Winter Haven.

Congratulations! – Congratulations to Timothy and Hope Meyer on the birth of their son, Mattias Redento, who is scheduled to be baptized during the service this morning. A meal is planned during the fellowship hour. All are invited.

Pastor Out of Town – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to be in Eau Claire this week attending synodical Board meetings. As a result, no midweek classes are scheduled for this week. Confirmation and Midweek Bible Study will resume, God willing, on May 4th.