



Sermon, November 6, 2016
Rev. Dr. Craig S. Pesti-Strobel
Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

The Prayer that Changes Us #10: **“And Lead Us Not Into Temptation, But Deliver Us From Evil”**

Matthew 6:7-13

The Message (MSG)

7-13 “The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They’re full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don’t fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this:

Our Father in heaven, Reveal who you are. Set the world right; Do what’s best— as above, so below. Keep us alive with three square meals. Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others. Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil. You’re in charge! You can do anything you want! You’re ablaze in beauty! Yes. Yes. Yes.

Opening: Temptations

I recently read a story about a little boy named Bobby who desperately wanted a new bicycle. His plan was to save his nickels, dimes and quarters until he finally had enough to buy a new 10-speed. Each night he asked God to help him save his money. Kneeling beside his bed, he prayed, "Dear Lord, please help me save my money for a new bike, and please, Lord, don't let the ice cream man come down the street again tomorrow."

Jim Grant in Reader's Digest told about someone else who faced temptation. An overweight businessman decided it was time to shed some excess pounds. He took his new diet seriously, even changing his driving route to avoid his favorite bakery. One morning, however, he showed up at work with a gigantic coffee cake. Everyone in the office scolded him, but his smile remained nonetheless. "This is a special coffee cake," he explained. "I accidentally drove by the bakery this morning and there in the window was a host of goodies. I felt it was no accident, so I prayed, 'Lord, if you want me to have one of those delicious coffee cakes, let there be a parking spot open right in front.' And sure enough, the eighth

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time around the block, there it was!" (Lee Griess, *Taking The Risk Out Of Dying*, CSS Publishing Company, from www.sermons.com)

Baptismal Vows

Ah yes, lead us not into temptation. I remember the bumper sticker that went around that said, “Lead us not into temptation, we can find it just fine on our own.” So after ten weeks of looking at this Prayer That Changes Us, we arrive at the part that asks God to keep us from evil. This actually reinforces a vow that we make when we are baptized. I invite you to turn with me in your hymnals to page 34, which is the service of the Baptismal Covenant. Here are the vows:

Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?

I do.

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?

I do.

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?

I do.

According to the grace given to you, will you remain faithful members of Christ's holy church and serve as Christ's representatives in the world?

I will.

These vows express succinctly our situation in the world. We are created for good in the world, to show forth the mercy and love of God. We are endowed by our Creator with purposes and potentialities, the noblest of which are to love God and serve one another. But there are cultural and social systems that move to thwart those potentials and purposes. This part of the Prayer of Jesus addresses the power those systems have over us. The Christian life is lived as a constant endeavor to transform the turmoil, rancor, and wickedness of human existence into the realm of harmony, love and fellowship that finds its origin in the mind of God. Just as human minds and hearts have systematized evil, human hearts and minds can tear down those structures and build instead structures of love, peace, goodwill and reconciliation.

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A Closer Look

So let's look closer at this closing part of the prayer. It is split into two parts: a petition not to be led into temptation or trial, and a petition to be delivered from evil. The Greek for “lead us not into temptation” literally means ‘to carry inward.’ This literally reads “Do not carry us inward (to yourself) in order to test us...”

The second part is parallel, The force of the Greek, *ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ*, means something like this: “draw us to yourself in order to deliver us from evil.” “Deliver us” has this meaning of draw to oneself. It is an appeal to God to rescue us by drawing us closer to God.

Both of these have a directional component to them, and both imply a movement toward the One who can lead or deliver, or more to the point, to the One to whom the prayer is addressed. The whole thing could be expanded to read as: “Do not carry us into yourself in order to test us, but draw us inward to deliver us from evil.”

This provides an interesting counterpoint to our imperative request that God come into the world and set up house in our lives. Having invited God into our reality, we are now being drawn into God's reality. We are requesting, therefore, that as we are drawn into God's reality that we not be tested (or experimented with) but that we be protected from evil. This sets up a protective force against the systems of evil and oppression in the world.

Resisting the System

“Do not bring us to the time of trial but save us from evil.” It should be obvious by now that, as the Prophet Isaiah reminds us, our ways are frequently not God's ways. By seeking after the heart of God, we are endeavoring to make God's ways our ways, but much of how the world is constructed by humans benefits a select few, usually to the detriment of the vast majority of people. This is a political and economic reality in the world. It is not new, nor is it by its antiquity indicative of the will of God. Isaiah's observation reminds us that “the way things are” is not because of God, but because of human choice. Societies that are structured

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unjustly are not haphazardly arranged. Everything in the society reinforces the prevailing worldview of the few benefitting from the labor or resources of the many, to the extent that considering any other possible arrangement is seen as heresy, or dissidence, or even betrayal. Evil is insidious in how it affects human thinking and behavior through peer pressure and social control. Praying to be saved from the time of trial and from evil addresses this deep enslavement of the mind. The very things Jesus teaches as spiritual disciplines in the Gospels serve as behaviors that resist evil and injustice in all its forms.

Praying this prayer of Jesus with full awareness of its social dimensions brings forth the full realization that asking God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven requires our active participation. In order to cultivate the mind of God and manifest that mind, you need to have a culture that strives to create conditions conducive to that pursuit. If the culture in which one is situated is sick, how will you be able to have any health yourself?

Wrap-up of the Series

By ending with this sentence, Jesus reminds us that all our prayers and aspirations and good intentions must be ratified by actions. When we pray “keep us from evil,” we are essentially putting a guard at our mouths and a check upon our actions. Our guard selects and edits our words, so that there is no need to ask forgiveness, because we have not said that which is offensive or hurtful to another. John Wesley provided the best simple rule of modeling our lives after the life of Jesus: “Do no harm, Do good. Do those things that keep you in love with God.”

This prayer really provides a model for a life patterned after the mind of Christ. It is a guide for prayer as well as a plan for living. We begin by aligning our wills with the will of God. We simplify our wants according to what is truly needful. We loosen the bonds of indebtedness and seek forgiveness where we have offended or transgressed against others. Then we resolve to live a life that works for the good of everyone in every situation.

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Conclusion

Glenn E. Ludwig tells about a place in Death Valley known as Dante's View. There, you can look down to the lowest spot in the United States, a depression in the earth 200 feet below sea level called Bad Water. But from that same spot, you can also look up to the highest peak in the United States, Mount Whitney, rising to a height of 14,500 feet. One way leads to the lowest and the other way to the highest. From that point, called Dante's View, any movement must be in one or the other direction. There are many times in life when we stand where the ways part and where choices must be made. It is often easier to trip along downhill than to walk the steady, or maybe rocky, uphill path. But the path uphill leads to a cross – an empty cross. And the one that walks beside us is the one who hung there and defeated it. (Glenn E. Ludwig, *Walking To...Walking With ...Walking Through...*, CSS Publishing Company)

It is this same Jesus who has given us this prayer to change our lives by changing our hearts and minds. From now on, when you pray this prayer, pray it mindfully and deeply, and let it slowly change you, a word at a time.