

Psalm 82

Amos 7:7-17

Colossians 1:1-14

Luke 10:25-37

We have arrived at our 4th of 5 Sermons based on the Lord's Prayer. This week we are thinking about the part that says, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Let us take this in two parts – the "leading us into temptation" part and then the "deliver us from evil" part.

It is a curious thing to contemplate – God leading us into temptation. According to one online source, "The range of meanings of the Greek word "πειρασμός" (peirasmos) is illustrated in The New Testament Greek Lexicon. In different contexts it can mean temptation, testing, trial, experiment." This brings us to mind the story of Job and his times of testing, which for some odd reason, God seems to allow - another thoroughly unsettling thought. And yet, we can all relate to this part of the prayer, I believe. We want to be spared the tests and trials that life apparently offers humanity.

For whatever reason, humanity perceives God as having some power over our temptations. Perhaps simply focusing on and believing in that power is what keeps us in faith. Perhaps this one part of the prayer exposes the root of our faith more than any other part of the prayer. By saying this, we are basically saying, I believe, o Lord, that you have the power to influence my life. "Lead me not into temptation," may mean, "I believe you can help me to become and stay a righteous person." The temptation is not the evil that happens to us – it is succumbing to fear and hopelessness – and losing faith that God is there, either through the Holy Spirit or through other humans.

Let us think again about the Gospel for today – the "Good Samaritan." Some bad things happened to the man who was robbed and left for dead, and the first one was that he was so sorely abused. But imagine for a moment you were that man, lying in pain, feeling violated – and two people walked by – each time hope arises that you might be saved from dying alone by the side of the road. The anguish and panic that he must have felt each time hope just walked away from him! The greatest evil would have been if that man had died in the cold dark night alone of a slow and painful death. But he was saved from the temptation to give up hope and succumb to the agony of feeling deserted and unloved – unprotected by God and his fellow humans.

Paul wrote to the Colossians in our Epistle text today, ". . . may you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father . . . who has rescued us from the power of darkness . . ." Strength to endure – to be freed from darkness – perhaps that is what we pray in our hearts when we say, "Lead us not into temptation."

We must also come to admit that those of faith who pray this prayer do not say these words without accepting some responsibility in the relationship. Children expect Mommy and Daddy to protect them from all harm – but as we become older and more responsible, we take into consideration that we are going to mess up. And we then have to face responsibility for those mistakes ourselves. So this part of the prayer returns us to the OUR FATHER relationship. We admit to God that we feel like children at times and we acknowledge that we will make mistakes and we do so sometimes unawares. We beg Daddy to help us not to stray too far away him. And by doing so – we acknowledge our responsibility to stay close. "I'm trying to follow you Daddy, but you know how we can get – easily distracted and tempted – don't let me stray too far away – I'll try to keep close!"

So we come to the part where we say, "but deliver us from evil." Curious that it is one sentence, we pray that we don't want to be led into temptation – and in a way, in the next breath we say, deliver us from evil. Almost like an inadvertent admission that we know we are going to end up somewhere where we are going to need to be saved from. And we do know this! We all have experienced our human weaknesses, where we could not save ourselves. We know that on our own, we may not have the courage or the strength – the insight - to make the right choices. We all need that mystical power who knows how we got into this mess and also knows how we are going to get out of this mess.

Deliverance comes in such a variety of ways. The Samaritan was delivered from evil through neighborly human compassion and single-mindedness. We see this deliverance in so many ways – human beings who through compassion

take action. Those who have decided they cannot live a life where everyday evolves only around themselves. They go out and wash oil off birds, take in stray animals, give money to good causes, call for help when a car is stopped on the roadside, shovel off neighbor's driveways, volunteer for the fire department. Everyday humanity comes to the rescue of others in need.

And I believe that God has a hand in all of it. The love of God – the compassion that is in our hearts – the courage to take action – the drive to act – those are Godly traits which we are all called to be a part of. If we are going to ask God for it for ourselves – we better be prepared to be God's hands for others as well.

"Deliver us God from the Evil one" – who is this evil one? There is evil out there, and we all know it. And we feel afraid and worried that one day, something will happen to us that we have no ability to deal with. And it can even be from within us. Addictions, depression, mental illnesses, physical pain and losses – all can cause evil to occur in us inadvertently. So sometimes our prayer to be delivered from evil is a very personal one. There is evil in us, we are capable of creating and living in evil – and God is then the only one who can help us out of that darkness.

Because, a relationship with "God our Father" places us in a position of power, as well. When we focus our energies on God, and pray to be led away from temptations – and when we admit our potential to be a part of evil in one way or another – we show just how normal we really are. We bind ourselves with the rest of the sane humanity who sees these things, and we become a part of the whole of life – the earth – the humans – and the God who connects us all together. We are given mercy and light and life and hope and we are then prepared to be that for others as well. It is the silly island of a human who removes themselves from the idea that they could cause evil, that they don't need anyone's help – that they are above temptations. They are blind and walking in darkness, and yet they may think they are above all the rest of humanity.

Faith and dependence on God is based on the understanding that there is still so much we do not know about ourselves, and we trust in the community of believers, the power of the Father God, the example of the brother Savior, and the mystical guidance of the Holy Spirit – we trust in all of them to guide us to a life that is fuller and more amazing than we could have designed for ourselves!

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" . . . we ask a God who is like a perfect loving powerful Father to lead us – which means that we are *following* him – and yet we know that there is evil in the world, and we pray to be delivered from it – *knowing* that we must not be selfish and we must be prepared to be that deliverance for others, as God uses others to be our deliverance as well.

Amen