

Matthew 6:13

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany (Series C)

Lessons for the Day: Genesis 45:3–15; 1 Corinthians 15:21–26, 30–42; Luke 6:27–38

Taught to Pray: Keep us From The Devil's Wiles

February 20, 2022

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Protesters carry out a violent attack on a pipeline work site in Northern B.C., leaving workers shaken and millions of dollars in damage. Thirteen protesters at the Coutts blockade are arrested and four are charged with conspiracy to commit murder after a cache of weapons, ammunition and body armour are found by police. Prime Minister Trudeau invokes the Emergencies Act to deal with disruptions at the borders and in Ottawa.

It doesn't take much for us to see that we live in a world that is far from the ideal of holy perfection that God created it to be. It is marred and scarred by evil. All the things we see happening around us are proof of the evil that exists. The tension in Ukraine, as it seems Russia is set to invade that country shows that evil exists. All the struggles we have with COVID bear witness to the evil that is part of our world. What's worse is that we ourselves are filled with sin and are so easily influenced and corrupted by its power. As the people of God, we are told: "***You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.***" (Leviticus 19:2, ESV) Unfortunately, we quickly find that we don't have what it takes on our own to be good and holy people. That is why Jesus teaches us to pray: "***Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.***"

Each of these last two petitions of the Lord's Prayer could be a sermon in itself. Yet they share a common theme—that the devil wants to keep us from trusting God's promises to us in Jesus Christ. The devil works to lead us into sin and shame, so that we despair of God's grace. He works the evil in our world that can overwhelm us. He is a sly, wily foe and uses the world around us—and even our own sinful flesh—to take us away from the hope that we have through Christ.

We start with asking that we will not be lead into temptation. The word "tempt" can have two very different meanings in Scripture. First of all, it can refer to the testing of our faith, which God uses to bring us closer to Himself. In this sense, God 'tempted' Abraham when he asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. The temptation or test for Abraham was in the struggle in having to choose between God and Isaac. The struggle was hard, but it strengthened Abraham's faith. God's *tests* are designed to help us grow. They are, if you will, spiritual exercise, that brings benefits to our souls, as exercise itself brings strength to our bodies.

On the other hand, the word tempt can refer to any and every attempt of our spiritual enemies to lure us away from God and His ways. Satan tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God and eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He tempted Judas to betray Christ. Whenever we have to choose either for or against good, whether to do good or do something evil, that is temptation. When we pray, "***Lead us not into temptation.***" we are not asking that God would not test our faith, for this is good for us. We are asking, as Luther explains, that He *would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.* (SC, 6th Petition)

You and I struggle with temptation to evil each and every day. The devil is so filled with hatred towards God that he will do anything and everything within his power to destroy God's creation. All the devil wants to do is to keep you from being eternally saved through faith in Christ Jesus. He works to lead us away from the truth. He works to keep us from living in accordance with God's will. He works to make us doubt God's love and forgiveness for us. And He has some very powerful allies in his struggle for our souls. The first is our own body, which so often gets caught up in its own pleasure and lusts. Our body tells us, "if it feels good, do it!" Don't worry about God or the things that He wants. It's what you want that matters. Before we know it, we work to please ourselves, and find ourselves far from God. It doesn't help that the whole world around us tells us the same thing. Check out the ads for alcoholic beverages on television. We are led to believe that real fun involves the perfect Caesar, or the right beer. There really is nothing wrong with having a drink—and maybe it shouldn't be so tempting, but many people have gone far beyond the occasional social drink to the party binging which has become a problem, especially among young people—many of whom are not even of legal drinking age. Or think of the misguided way that the world approaches sexuality. We are bombarded with sexual images and ideas in ads, in music, in television shows. Very few of the worldly views are in keeping with the glorious gift that God gave us in true sexuality. And people are tempted. They are led

astray. The world tells us that since everyone is doing it, it must be all right. But let us never forget that the world is filled with evil people, people who don't care what is right or wrong in the sight of God. And yet we are so easily swayed by the world that we find ourselves further and further from God and His holy, righteous will.

But the real power behind temptation is the devil himself. I always think of Flip Wilson: "the devil made me do it". And to a certain extent, that is true. The devil is the one who tells us that God really won't mind if we sin. He is the one who tells us we are free to do anything we want, as long as we don't hurt anyone else. When Sunday comes, and you don't feel like getting out of bed, it is the devil who tells you that God really won't mind if you skip church this week, and he finds a willing ally in your own tired body. "It really doesn't matter", the devil says. But it matters to God! The devil would have you think that it is only what you want that matters. And the devil laughs. After all, the devil really has only one goal in mind, and that is the eternal destruction of everyone who is near and dear to God. Peter warns us: ***Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*** (1 Peter 5:8 - ESV) That is what the devil wants to do. He wants to devour you. He wants to keep you from the life God wants to give to you. And he will do whatever it takes to lead you into temptation, for then he can lead you into guilt and despair, and finally, lead you away from God eternally.

But the devil is not content to simply tempt you to evil. He also wants to bring evil upon you. Again, we can think of all that we see on the news any day of the week. All the disasters, murders, accidents and wars that go on give us a pretty fair idea of what Satan does with his free time. It is said that the only good news you can find is that the things we read in the paper are *news*, and not our own personal tragedies. That doesn't mean that we are immune to disaster or trouble. We, or those we love, have been victims in accidents, fires or other disasters. We have had our share of problems, some more so than others, and in all these things we see the terrible effects of sin at work in our world. We see the evil that is around us, that the devil inflicts upon us. That is why Jesus teaches us to pray for the strength to resist temptation, and also to pray, ***deliver us from evil.*** We pray that God would keep us from the devil's seductive temptations, and that He would protect us from the devil's evil deeds.

We need to pray these petitions, because you and I do not have the strength to withstand the devil's treachery on our own. As Paul reminds us: ***For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*** (Ephesians 6:12 - ESV) We mere mortals are fighting a supernatural enemy. How can we ever hope to overcome him? We need someone to deliver us from evil, to save us from the devil, from temptation, and from sin's power over us.

St. Paul saw the devil at work in his own life and said: ***"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*** (Romans 7:24-25, ESV) Luther echoes that same thought in his great hymn, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, which is basically a commentary on these petitions. As Luther says: ***"With might of ours can naught be done, Soon were our loss effected; But for us fights the valiant One, Whom God Himself elected. Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is, Of Sabaoth Lord, And there's none other God; He holds the field forever."*** (LSB 656, st. 2) God has already answered all that we ask when we pray, ***And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*** His answer is in Jesus Christ. As God had promised Adam and Eve in Eden, Christ came to destroy the very hold that the devil had on sinful mankind. He came to destroy sin and death by bringing us forgiveness and life. It happens in the most dramatic of conflicts, at the cross, where it almost seems that the devil gained the upper hand. Jesus suffers all the punishment we deserve, and he suffers every attack the devil can muster. He dies for us. But that is not the end of the battle, for Jesus also rises again, destroying death itself. His resurrection is the deliverance we need. And because He lives, the victory has been won. That gives us the confidence to say with Luther: ***Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, We tremble not, we fear no ill; They shall not overpower us. This world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done; One little word can fell him.*** (LSB 656, st. 3)

Luther explained that "little word" in two ways. He says that Jesus is that little Word that defeats the devil, and so we cling to Him in faith. But Luther also says that we shout at the devil, "Liar!" When we know that, the devil loses his sway over us. Thankfully, we can trust the Saviour who says: ***I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.***" (John 16:33 - ESV) He, who has overcome the world, death and the devil is the one who can, and who does, deliver His people from the evils of this life. In His death and resurrection, He assures us that our prayers for help and deliverance have been answered. He does deliver us and He will deliver us into the glorious kingdom He has prepared for His faithful and trusting children. What a great answer our God gives us to these petitions! Praise Him for His delivering and preserving love! Amen.