

Wesley United Methodist Church  
Rev. Beverly E Stenmark  
Title: Deliver Us  
Text: James 1:12-18  
Mark 7:14-23

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Have you ever wondered by we pray, “Lead us not into temptation?” Do we believe that God is the one who tempts us? If so, why would God tempt us? I have a hard time thinking about God sitting around deciding to tempt us. But why did Jesus teach his disciples to pray in a way that sounds like we are asking God not to tempt us, when in Mark’s gospel, and elsewhere, Jesus is quite clear that it is not God who tempts us, but rather God who gives us the strength to withstand temptation. James couldn’t be any clearer, “No one who is tested should say, ‘God is tempting me!’.” James is quite clear that it is our own cravings that tempt us.

Most of the temptations we face daily, are what we would call “small potatoes”. However, over time those small things can become substantial – they can become a slippery slope that can lead us in a direction that we know is not what God wants for us. We can be pretty creative when it comes to justifying why we give into things that give us temporary physical or emotional pleasure. But we know that temptation is really more complex than that.

One of the problems comes when we are so tempted to satisfy our own temporary pleasures that we forget about the needs of others. We can pretty easily convince ourselves that satisfying all of our own desires is more important than feeding those who are hungry, or providing clothing,

health care or heat for those who most need it. We can become so good at it, that we fail to even see a connection. We fail to see that the money we spend to over indulge ourselves could be used to meet the most basic survival needs of others. God doesn't tempt us, and we need to face up to our own responsibilities rather than trying to place the blame for what we do on God, or "the evil one" or anyone else.

So, maybe when we are praying, "Lead us not into temptation" we are really praying, "help to lead me away from those things that tempt me; those places, times, situations, when we put ourselves about everything else.

"Deliver us from evil." I do believe that there is real evil out there, but more often the "evil" that we encounter, like the temptations that face us, can be smaller. Once again, we may fail to recognize the evil around us – or especially to recognize when we have become part of that evil.

I have become more aware recently of a subtle and insidious form of evil that many of us encounter every day. I am referring to the way we humans speak to each other and especially the way we take advantage of the anonymity of social media to spew garbage out of our mouths. It seems that the majority of the posts that I see on Facebook manage to work themselves into a tirade on political issues. A recent example involved an exchange about who voted for which candidate for President. There were people on both sides of this who were extremely cruel in the words they used to describe the people who voted for the other candidate.

We've all seen it in one form or another – and some of us lament it and proclaim that we wouldn't allow our children or grandchildren to speak that way about someone else. And yet, as it becomes more and more

common, and familiar, there is sadly a temptation to become part of that culture.

Perhaps asking God to “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” should remind us of the places and times when we may participate in behaviors that cause alienation from others.

Paul Meier suggests that we need to once again remember that these words and their meanings to us, may be very different than what they meant when Jesus spoke in Hebrew or Aramaic. Delivering us from evil may mean deliverance from whatever it is that is holding us back or keeping us from our full potential, from our true purpose in life – from being fully connected with God. The temptation may be those things that we allow to get in the way. It may be that a good way for us to understand this is “Grant us the strength to resist temptation.”<sup>1</sup>

For an individual, it may mean that our fear of failure causes us to sit in front of a tv all day rather than to take the risk to try something that we are afraid of trying or something that we think we might fail at. It may be that the fear of failure is the real evil in your life keeping you from your true purpose in life.

For a congregation, it may mean that fear of change can keep us from our true purpose, from being all that God calls us to be. We may be tempted to justify it by talking about how good things are now, or blaming someone or something else, rather than looking at our fear of change. Our purpose as a community of faith should be to continue Christ’s work in the world – healing, comforting, feeding, bringing peace, spreading the good news. Anything that stands in the way of achieving those things may be

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<sup>1</sup> Underwood, Don. Pray Like Jesus: Rediscovering the Lord’s Prayer. loc. 1082+

evil – and sometimes we can be very creative about what those things might be.<sup>2</sup>

If, in praying the Lord's Prayer together, each person is asking to be made aware of how our presence contributes to the community's purpose and if we are asking God to help us clear away those things that prevent us from our true purpose as the Body of Christ, then we might get better at it. We might bring more of the Good News to people, and we might get better at doing what God would have us do.

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” “Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.” “Grant us the strength to resist temptation.”

The rest of the Lord's Prayer is not found in most translations of the Bible. It was probably added to the prayer by some early Christian community. “For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” What happens when you get to that part of the prayer. Do you breathe a sigh of relief and think, “I'm almost done”? Do you rush through those last words almost as an afterthought?

When I think about this part of the prayer, I think about two things. I am old enough, as are some of you, that I remember when we used to say the Lord's Prayer every morning in school. I was one of very few non-Catholics in my class. Even though the teacher had told us that we should pray the prayer in the way that we knew, I didn't want my voice to be the only one at the end saying, “For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.” I would begin saying the prayer with my classmates but somewhere near the middle I would stop and very softly I would speed up the prayer so that I would get to include the last sentence of the prayer and

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<sup>2</sup> Meier, Paul. The Lord's Prayer: Finding New Meanings Within the language Jesus Spoke. Loc. 701-777

still end at the same time as everyone else. I didn't want to stick out or draw attention to myself, so instead, I chose to treat this part of the prayer as something to get through quickly.

The second thing that I think of is the musical rendition of the Lord's Prayer that Martha shared with us recently. Many of you know that my father used to sing that here. In preparing this sermon series, every time I typed the words of the prayer, I heard my father's voice singing. The last part of the prayer is powerful and strong and louder than some of the other sections of that musical arrangement. Each phrase is louder than the one before and I think it was an effort for him to reach some of those higher notes but when he sang that part of the prayer, I would get goosebumps as he would crescendo toward the end and then become softer during the "Amen."

It was powerful and spoke to my inner being. It reminded me that this wasn't just something to get through quickly so that I finished with everyone else, but rather this was really a doxology – a song of praise to God.

This Doxology, this ending to the prayer, with the proclamation that "thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever" reminds us one more time, that this prayer is not about me, not about us, but it is about God. It is a powerful reminder to live the presence of God's overwhelming grace – that grace that makes us whole in spite of everything that makes us broken.

Don Underwood, reminds us that it is really as simple as, "Either God is or God isn't." We don't get any other choices. The choice we make will determine how we live our lives. The choice we make will leave no part of our life untouched.

He writes, “Reciting the Lord’s Prayer daily is a powerful way of answering that question every single day. Either God is or God isn’t. Either this day belongs to God or it doesn’t. Either my life is ultimately in the hands of God or it isn’t. Praying the prayer that Jesus taught not only helps us rediscover great biblical truths; it can provide a daily moment of truth in which we make a conscious commitment to live the powerful and joyous life of faith.”<sup>3</sup>

It is my hope and my prayer that as we move forward, we will pay attention to the words we are praying when we pray this prayer. Because the prayer is so familiar it is easy to just rattle off the words without paying attention to them, without really praying. This is a powerful prayer. It is a good summary of the faith that we proclaim and it reminds us that we are a community of faith – this prayer does not include the words, “me, my, or mine” but rather, “Give us, forgive us, lead us, deliver us”. It is a reminder that we are part of God’s plan and we have a responsibility in helping God’s will to be done, in our lives and in our world because only then will we know true peace. Only then will all of God’s creation have enough food to eat. Only then will we treat each other as we want others to treat us. Only then will God’s kingdom come on earth – as it is in heaven.

“Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.”

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<sup>3</sup>Underwood, Loc. 1283.

