

2018 07 29 – Lead Us Not into Temptation

Mark 4:1-11

This summer we have been exploring The Lord's Prayer through a seven week sermon series. For the purposes of this exploration, we have been using the version of the prayer that is found in the gospel of Matthew – the version that prayed earlier today. This morning, we will be looking at the last line of that prayer: "And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one"

We are going to begin by focussing on the first half of this line: "do not bring us to the time of trial." Of course, we are more used to a slightly different translation that goes like this: "Lead us not into temptation." Another popular version is "Do not put us to the test."

But many theologians, preachers and lay people struggle with this line. Think about it, every Sunday, when we pray this prayer, we are asking God not to lead us into temptation, not to put us to the test or not to bring us to the time of trial. But in other parts of the Bible it is clear that God does not test us, but rather provides us with the means to endure our temptations or our trials. For instance in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians it says, "No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it."

In fact, I read online this week, that even Pope Francis has recognized the need to change this particular line in The Lord's Prayer. Like many other church leaders, he doesn't believe that God leads us into temptation. So he is recommending a change. He has suggested "do not let us fall into temptation" or some other phrase that recognizes God's saving power.

<https://qz.com/1151592/pope-francis-lords-prayer-translation-the-pope-wants-a-new-translation-for-christianitys-most-famous-prayer/>

Of course, as you have seen over the past few weeks, we already have versions of Jesus' Prayer that change this line substantially. For instance, the Ecumenical Version that is found on page 921 in Voices United uses the words, "Save us from the time of trial" and in the paraphrase on page 916 in Voice United we find, "In times of temptation and test, strengthen us. From trials too great to endure, spare us."

These new versions link closely with the second part of today's line from the Lord's Prayer which refers directly to God's saving power. In Matthew 6 we read, "rescue us from the evil one" in the traditional version that we usually prayer we say, "deliver us from evil" and in my favourite paraphrase we pray, "from the grip of all that is evil, free us." It is clear, that with these words, we are praying for God's help as we face the many forces of evil, the many temptations that are part of our living.

So what is the evil that we are asking God to deliver us from? What are the trials or temptations that we need to be saved from? We already started

answering that question during our Community Learning Time. During that time we named many of the temptations that face us on a day to day basis. These are all issues that can impact our quality of life and our relationship with our families and with God. For instance, when Jesus was tempted in the desert, he was very hungry and the devil suggested that he turn stones into bread, but Jesus knew that the power he had been given was not to be used in that way. There are many times in our lives when we have to say, “No,” to temptation even when saying, “Yes,” would be easier and would give us a short-term gain or pleasure. Temptations come in all shapes and sizes. They can have a relatively small or a huge impact on our lives.

Ron Lavin, a Lutheran priest, suggests that it is during the most difficult trials of our lives that we often experience a sense of forsakenness. During these times it may seem as if God has abandoned us. He tells the story of a young man named Ron Heagy who broke his neck while swimming. One night, Ron finally realized that he would never walk or use his body in a normal way again, and he began sobbing in the darkness of his hospital room. He cried out, “God, I can’t go on. If I will never again be able to use my body, I don’t want to live. I have loved you all my life. Where are you now when I need you the most? I give up.”

Ron was in the midst of an incredible trial and was losing any sense of hope. He was tempted to give up all together. But just then, Ron heard a child’s voice. It was the voice of his eight-year-old roommate who had been paralyzed in a bike accident. Since the accident, the young boy had not spoken until this moment, “Ron,” the boy said, “I love you. Don’t give up. God is here. God will help you.”

“That,” said Ron Heagy, “was the turning point in my life. The voice of the child was the voice of God telling me to change my attitude.” Today, Ron goes around the country in his electric wheel chair which he moves with his chin and tells his story of how God saved him in his time of trial (Ron Lavin, *Abba*, page 76-77). And so we all pray, “Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.”

Dominic Crossan, a renowned biblical scholar, would argue that in his prayer Jesus was actually referring to a specific form of temptation. Jesus grew up in Galilee at a time of great persecution and violence. When he was born the Romans had just recently destroyed a nearby city and had probably pillaged his parent’s village of Nazareth as well. As a boy he would have heard many stories of pain and violence and many expressions of anger and resentment.

But Jesus chose not to respond to violence with violence. In fact, in today’s scripture we hear that Jesus was given the opportunity to lead all the dominions of the world if only he would worship the Devil. Think about it, he could have been Emperor of Rome, the King of Judea and the Leader of Persia. That would have been the perfect revenge for what had happened to his people. But despite that temptation, Jesus knew that power by force was not God’s way. He knew that revenge would only result in more violence and war. Jesus wanted to work towards God’s reign of peace and justice so he chose a non-violent approach to his ministry instead. According to Dominic Crossan, this was the prayer that Jesus was praying, that he and his followers would continue along a non-violent path to God’s reign on earth (*The Greatest Prayer*, pages 163-182).

May we also follow the way of Jesus, trusting in God's presence, and making the choices with will lead us to healing and hope, to peace and justice.