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Lent 2

“The Prayer of Jesus: Deliverance”

Ephesians 2:1 – 10
Luke 4:1 – 13
Matthew 6:13

Text: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (Mt. 6:13)

A mother was teaching her 3-year old daughter the Lord's Prayer. At bedtime, she repeated after her mother the lines from the prayer. Finally, she decided to go solo. Mom listened with pride as she carefully enunciated each word, right up to the end of the prayer: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us some E-mail.”

Today's petition in the Lord's Prayer – “and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (which in some cases could be E-mail)” – is one that we pray rather quickly and without much thought as we hurry to get to the grand Protestant crescendo, “for Thine is the Kingdom, and the power and the glory forever.” As you pray those last words you can almost hear the words singing in your head of Malotte's famous and most popular version of the Lord's Prayer.

However, for those who are tormented by addictions, hard to break habits, or are seeking to change their lives, these words – “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” are very serious. And while that is true, all of us should pay close attention to these words for temptation is all around us; in fact, we are surrounded by it so much, we often are unaware of its influence.

I had the wonderful opportunity to study with Walter Wink, one of the great Bible scholars of the latter part of the 20th century. While I was studying with him, he was authoring his three part series on *The Powers*. The first was *Naming the Powers*, the second was *Engaging the Powers*, and the third was *Unmasking the Powers*. In this remarkable study, Wink builds on Biblical teachings – primarily on Paul's letters – that our world is filled with powers that are so prominent that we do not even know the hold they have on us. Paul was very aware of this. Listen to these words from our lesson from Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus:

“You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, ***following the ruler of the power of the air***, the spirit now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.” (Eph. 2:1-2)

In other words, Wink said, “We do not choose to come under the influence of principalities and powers, we are born into them, are fed them, and breathe them.”

“Well, what are they?” you may ask. Examples of them include:

- In England there is the saying, “the king is dead, long live the king.” It is an example of the prevailing power of the monarchy, even at the time the King has died.

- In Jesus' day, people were born into a situation where their country was under the oppressive rule of a foreign government – Rome.
- In our day, we are born into a bombardment of free-enterprise that wants to constantly seduce us into thinking we don't have enough; that to make our living good, we need one more thing, the newest gadget.

And we have our own conflicting powers that influence our behavior. Consider these mantras we all have heard and probably used.

- Work hard and you will succeed
- On the other hand, we like to say all are created equal
- And deep down we hold true that we wouldn't have it if we didn't deserve it.

Wink went so far as to say, that in our society, one of the powers that exerts control in our lives is the saying "God is good." But he went on to say, ultimately we really don't believe that God is good – because **we determine** goodness and who is eligible for it. We make laws and rules within our society (restrictive zoning laws, immigration laws, property taxes, how our foreign and military aid is used, etc.). In other words we determine who is good and we determine that those we consider "good" get "the goods" and get to keep them.

However, Wink went on to say that through the redemptive power of Jesus death and resurrection, those powers have been revealed to be bankrupt. They have been unmasked to reveal the sham they are. Our continuing task is to constantly take the mask off so we can see how bankrupt the "powers of this world" are, because the powers will constantly lure us with their temptation, and lead us down a path that may tempt us to do evil things.

So let's look at the Gospel reading from Luke. The setting is when Jesus, freshly baptized, is "led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days He fasted and was tempted by the devil."

Ahhhhhh, the first question you might have is why is it that Jesus was led **by the Spirit** into the wilderness **to be tempted by the devil**? What kind of collusion between God and the devil is this? Why, if Jesus needs temping, does the Spirit not provide it? Why place Jesus in ultimate jeopardy by throwing Him the hands of the devil? Those questions are the right ones to ask, for in asking them and studying how Jesus responded they move the devil from being evil personified, to being the ultimate sifter, the setter of choice, the one who is the fuller's soap and the refiner's fire. The devil becomes the one who is the tempter, not God's Spirit. The devil is the one who puts choices before us – and we choose to succumb to them or to resist them.

Anyway, at the end of the 40 days in the wilderness, Satan comes to Jesus to tempt Him in three ways: first to turn the stones into bread to satisfy his hunger; second, Satan showed Jesus all kingdoms of the world and tempted Jesus that they would be at His disposal if Jesus would worship Satan. And the third was to have Jesus depend on God's angels to rescue Him when Jesus would jump off the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem.

Jesus refutes all of these temptations by quoting Scripture: "we shall not live by bread alone"; "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only God"; and finally, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." The dominant image of these three temptations – well, let the devil say it, from Luke's Gospel:

Then the devil led [Jesus] up and showed Him in an instant all the Kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. And the devil said to [Jesus]: "To You I will give their glory and all authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If You, then, will worship me, it will be Yours." (Luke 4:5 – 7)

The temptation is that when we succumb to the temptation of the devil, we ultimately end up worshipping the devil. In other words, in the Prayer of Jesus, we are told to demand of God, that God not lead us in the kind of temptation Jesus Himself faced, and that we be delivered from evil.

It is important to note two things about the three temptations Jesus faced.

1.) First of all, they are the same temptations we face on a daily basis. We all want our food. And to be able to take and make food of something as plentiful as rocks would truly be beneficial – we could even solve the world’s hunger problems.

Next Jesus was tempted to jump from the pinnacle of the temple – and surely the angels will rescue Him. Well, don’t we all want to be indestructible? Who doesn’t want to be spared disease? Or to be healed miraculously when we have one?

And then finally Jesus was tempted to have all worldly power; to relive the Kingdom of David! And who among us doesn’t want to have more power over our lives. Who doesn’t want the “good old days” to return, as tarnished and biased as our selective memories may be? But remember how the devil or Satan, framed this temptation, “To You I will give their glory and all authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If You, then, will worship me (the devil), it will be Yours.”

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2.) The second thing to note about these temptations is that Satan is tempting Jesus with what everyone of that time understood to be the will of God for the Messiah. The expectations for the Messiah included a Savior that could feed everyone, a Savior immune to disease and destruction, and finally a Savior that would rule the entire world. These were the Messianic expectations the Hebrews had – they wanted a Royal King, a military leader and conqueror. This was the exact job description for the Messiah – as created by the religious people of His own day (and several days/years before that). And what irony it is: everyone in Israel knew the will of God – except, apparently Jesus, who through these temptations resisted the temptation to other worldly powers. Instead of succumbing to the powers of the world, which would cause Jesus to worship – not God – but the devil, Jesus instead choose to be fully human as we have all been created.

And what was Satan’s role in all of this? The devil’s task is a subtle one; the devil throws up to Jesus the collective Messianic hopes, and by so doing brings them for the first time to the consciousness as options to be chosen rather than as a fate to be accepted. Even though the Law and the prophets had fueled the Hebrews expectations of a Royal, military conqueror, Jesus perceived them as “yesterday’s will of God,” not what was proceeding out of the mouth of God.

The devil offered Jesus, in short, not outright evils but the highest goods known to Israel. That is when the temptation is most difficult to discern – when the devil tempts us with the good instead of the best. And what this does to us when we succumb to such temptations is that we become someone other than ourselves and we worship the devil’s temptations, instead the God of all love. We want that one more thing, that extra bit of power. We succumb to the tempting powers that the devil sets before us.

Henri Nouwen said in *Mornings with Henri J. M. Nouwen*, “What makes the temptation of power so seemingly irresistible? Maybe it is that power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love. It seems easier to be God, than to love God; easier to control people, than to love people; easier to own life, than to love life. Jesus asks, do you love me? We respond, ‘Can we

sit at your right hand and your left hand in your Kingdom?’ (Mt. 20:21). . . . We have been tempted to replace love with power.”¹

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

In the midst of South Africa's struggle against apartheid, one of the most respected voices for racial harmony and human dignity has been that of Bishop Desmond Tutu. But even the closest colleagues of Tutu are sometimes distressed by the bishop's tolerance and moderation. They wish he would be more aggressive with his opponents. One of them said, “At his age you'd think he would have learned to hate a little more. But there is this problem with Tutu: he believes literally in the gospel.” What he was saying, in effect, is that Tutu knows who he is, and remembers his baptism. He knows the gospel story, and he will not change the script. Tutu faces the temptation of power and reputation, but has continually chosen love.

Resisting temptation is not easy. Delivering us from evil is not easy – contrary to the commercials for **Staples**.

You know their commercials; I would suggest to you that those **Staples** commercials illustrate the power of the devil's various temptations. In their ads, whenever an individual confronts a difficult situation, all they have to do is reach over and push a red, over-sized, glowing button that reads, “easy.”

Got to pick up three kids, make dinner, finish that report at work, and be supportive to your spouse? No problem, just push the big easy button.

Need to do a risky surgery never performed before? Hey, just push the big easy button.

Faced with the need to balance economic growth and stability with environmental safety and the welfare of worldwide ecosystems? No problem, just push the big easy button.

Big problem: there are no easy buttons. There's no easy button to free us from the times of trials and tests.

When we pray this petition let us remember that Jesus taught us to pray, not “save us from temptation,” but “lead us not into temptation.” Jesus knew that, just as He had to, we will face temptation all our lives – without an easy button to push. So Jesus taught us to pray:

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Remember your baptism and be thankful. It is a baptism that is given by God so that you, like the Christ within you, may stand up to the temptations of this world that can be so alluring.

¹ Henri Nouwen in *Mornings with Henri J.M. Nouwen*, quoted in *Christianity Today*, February 8, 1999, 72.