

Lead Us Not into Temptation, but Deliver Us from Evil

PSA Sunday, March 6, 2011

Ashley Rube

Clearly, there is a lot of comfort to be had in these words. God is with us, and God is big enough to take care of our problems. But like the other appeals we make in the Lord's Prayer, the appeal for deliverance functions in two ways: it speaks to God's nature – one who fills our needs and desires (like our desire for safety and health); *and* it teaches us how we are meant to respond to God – how we are expected to behave as God's people.

It's worth mentioning from the start that we are continuing to pray for all of "us" just as we have throughout the prayer. So while we can certainly ask for God's mercy in personal matters – for sickness or injury or financial issues or other dangers – we cannot pray the Lord's *Prayer* without praying for all of the Lord's *people*.

But what does it mean for us personally when we ask God to "deliver us from evil?" As Beth discussed evil is something threatening and beyond our control. It is at once close enough to trouble us and too big to even wrap our brains around.

So we ask to be delivered, which, as we heard before, is quite literal – like delivering a package. We pray to be moved and to be distanced from evil.

Now, this is a spatial understanding of evil and deliverance. Evil here – me way over there. But, as it turns out, that is not all we are praying for. The 12th verse of the passage from Ephesians we read earlier puts evil in this context: ¹²"For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness." The author of this passage emphasizes the reality of evil around us *and the potential for evil in us*. Our struggle is not just against enemies of the flesh, or those people or things that might do us physical harm. The struggle is against the authorities – against institutions built up around us everywhere; in far-away places even right here in Clemson. It's the struggle against **this present darkness**. That's the evil we participate in. Evil might sound otherworldly, and it can be. But it might also be buying products from a company that exploits sweatshop labor. It might be hurting a co-worker's reputation to get ahead. It might be wasting food when we know other people in the world are going hungry. It might be staying silent when we see wrongs committed. It might be apathy. It might be any number of things.

So we ask to be delivered. But if evil can be in us, what does asking to be delivered from it mean for us? Miriam Webster defines "deliver" as "to give birth." The Lord's Prayer takes on entirely new meaning when we understand "deliver" in this way. It's no longer about moving us from one place to another, like a pizza or a letter. Deliver in this sense is the *emergence* of something new; it is the act of bringing new life into the world. So when we pray to God for deliverance, we aren't just asking to be relocated. We are asking to be reborn. And understand, when we pray the Lord's Prayer it is ok to ask to be kept safe and to be moved away from the evils that affect our lives. But it's important to bear in mind that there is more within these words than transportation. Because perhaps what Jesus was also instructing his disciples to do was to pray for transformation.

You see, this passage appears at the end of the prayer for a reason. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he was defining what it meant to be in relationship with God, and everything up to this point has done that. So if we mean what we have said before, then we aren't just saying, "deliver us!" We are saying, "We are your children, transform us!" "We want to do your will, transform us!" "We trust you to provide, transform us!" "We need your forgiveness, transform us!"

You see, praying for deliverance from evil is easy to do – we do it every week if not every day. But praying for deliverance also requires an investment on our part and a willingness to live into the life God has planned for us. Because doesn't it make sense that Jesus teaches us that, in the same breath we use to submit to God's will, we must also ask for transformation?

My sister Stephanie taught me about transformation when we were in high school. It's a story I tell often to help people understand the kind of relationship we have. See, my sister and I are really close *now*, but being friends has been a definite process. She is over 3 years older than me, and for many years that age gap prevented a really close friendship. When I entered high school our lives suddenly looked much more similar. We had things in common; we shared some of the same problems, even some of the same teachers. One morning she was driving us to school, and we were laughing about something together. And I recall mentioning that it was funny we hadn't had more conversations like this one before, conversations where we shared stories and laughed about the silly things we encountered day to day. That's when she told me it wasn't surprising to her at all. That's when she said, "Well Ashley, we couldn't have these conversations before. You weren't a real person then." It wasn't something I had ever expected anyone to question, to be honest, but she wasn't implying I was a figment of her imagination (or as I preferred to describe it – her dream come true). What she was saying was that I'd gained a personality. I was figuring out who I was and I was finally living into my own identity.

The question for us, then, is what identity are we living into? Is it one defined completely by our relationship to God, to the Father who provides and forgives? Or is it something else? I can say with certainty that, whatever it is, we often fall short of what God intends because evil is here in this present darkness, and it is something in this life that we have to deal with. But God is faithful and God forgives. And that's a lot of hope and promise to carry in the face of evil, even our own. So we pray as Jesus taught, to be transformed and to be given the courage to embrace our true identities in Christ, hopeful and expectant, looking forward to God's kingdom and glory forever. We pray as individuals, as a church, and as a world for transformation into who we were created to be.