

Praying for Reign: *Lead Us Not into Temptation*
Matthew 6:13; 26:36-46

I think I can relate to the people who lined the streets on the first Palm Sunday waving Palm branches as Jesus rode into their capitol city. They cried out to him, “Hosanna”, meaning, “deliver us”; “save us now!” After all, their lives were hard as they served under the rule of what they considered to be an ungodly and harsh outside government. And, although some people in Jerusalem were suspicious of this young rabbi riding into Jerusalem, he had gathered quite a following with all his miracles and his profound teaching. As he entered Jerusalem that day, many people thought he might be the long-expected deliverer, the Messiah their prophets had foretold.

In other words, on Palm Sunday the people were expressing a deep longing for things to be different. They were yearning for Jesus to be the one who would change things. In effect, when they cried out, “Hosanna”, they were saying, “Things cannot stay the way things are. We pray, Jesus, that you will be the one who will save us, that you will deliver us from this evil.”

That’s one thing that makes Palm Sunday so relevant to me. I relate to the people’s longing for things to be different from the way they are. Can you empathize with them in that? Are there any things in your life – and in this world -- that you long to be different from the way they are? On that day of Jesus’s triumphal entry, the people were wrong in thinking that what they needed Jesus to do was to provide military and political deliverance from Rome. But, make no mistake about it, they were right in sensing that Jesus was the rescuer. He had come to make things right. He had come to bring the kingdom of God.

All this brings us to the phrase in the Lord’s Prayer, “*Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*”

My Experience Praying the Lord’s Prayer

I think this part of Jesus’s prayer is the way Jesus teaches us to express in prayer what I am calling today, “**Palm Sunday’s Heart Cry**.” I think the only way I can explain to you why I find this phrase in the Lord’s Prayer to be so connected with the longings of the people on the first Palm Sunday is to tell you how I personally experience praying The Lord’s Prayer. Let me walk you through it phrase by phrase. When I pray the Lord’s Prayer, I pray something like this:

- ***Our Father in heaven...*** – “I am in awe that I can meet with you as a child meets with a loving Father – and to know that you don’t have the limitations those of us have who are fathers on earth. You never leave us. You never abuse us. You want the best for me and for all your children. And, you can bring about the best because you are our Father in heaven. So, Abba, you are the one whose name I want to hallow, i.e., to reverence and desire above anything else in this world. May your name be seen to be good and holy in me, by me, and through me in this world.
- ***Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*** – “...for your kingdom has not come in all its fullness. There are so many things that still are wrong, Father. Your will is not being done – in our world and, I confess Lord, in my life either. So, I bring you these petitions...
- ***Give us this day our daily bread*** – Even when I have more than enough, Lord, I need to pray this so I will not forget that whatever I have is all from you. And, I do have needs today, Father – or I think I do. Give me today what I need to live for you and to honor you. And, give us in our church family and community daily bread. Father in heaven, when you have given me more than I need, also give me the love of Jesus to provide your bread for those in distress you bring across my path. And, especially, provide for the needs of all who come to our church today.
- ***And forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us*** -- ...I must pray this, Father, because I confess that I am one who has not always been doing your will on earth. I have fallen short of your glory and participated both in doing what I know is wrong as well as failing to do what I know is right. But, even as I confess that to you, I receive the forgiveness purchased through the blood of Jesus. And, as a recipient of that kind of costly mercy, I will seek to further your blessing of forgiveness by offering forgiveness to others.
- ***Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil*** – Father, I am filled with sorrow that I must confess to you the same sins I have confessed so often before. Why is it taking me so long to be made

complete in Christ? Heavenly Father, I want my life to be different from the ways it has been. But, I am distressed by the fact that I know that, when I leave this place of prayer, I go back into the trials and temptations that I have faced before and have failed in before. So, lead me, Father – not into places and situations where I fail but to places where I know your presence. And when I am there, deliver me from evil and from the power of the Evil One that my life might bring honor to you.

The Realities That Emerge When We Pray This Way

I hope you can see how I understand this phrase, “lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil” through the way I pray it in my prayer. I see it as flowing out of all that Jesus taught in the Lord’s Prayer -- especially the preceding line about forgiveness. When I pray this way, I identify several realities:

1. **Humble Realism** – that God’s Kingdom has not yet come in all its fullness. I own up to the fact that I do not always do his will. I acknowledge that, in my own strength, there is no way I will break addictions, resist temptations to do wrong, and overcome trials without anxiety and doubt. I take time to identify the places where, whenever I go there, I give in to temptation – to certain websites, to a particular bar or gym, or to a place where I buy what I do not need. In other words, I give words in my prayer to the reality that, when I go in to this world, I go into places like what Martin Luther wrote about so vividly, “Though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo me...” I am saying honestly and humbly that I need divine help if I’m going to live as I should live.
2. **Heartfelt Longing** – to be led and delivered by God instead of driven by my own cravings and bound by the temptations of this world. I find this prayer to express a longing for things to be different -- for my own life to be different. So, when I go out into each place in this world every day of my life, I go into places and situations in which there is temptation. In some of them, I know that I usually fail when I go there. But, since meeting Jesus, I also am passionate about my life pleasing him. So, I pray, “As you lead me Lord, I pray that your leading will not take me into a place of failure but into a place in which I will experience your presence, your power and your salvation.”
3. **Divine Deliverance** – that God alone can save us. He never leaves us or forsakes us. God can do in us what we cannot do on our own. Daniel Fong, from our church, sent me this week a prayer from Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It seems to me to be one that flows directly from what Jesus taught us to pray:
*We come before you, source of all being, as sinners. We have betrayed you.
We saw a great lie raise its head, and we did not honor the truth.
We saw our brethren in direst need, and we feared for our own safety...
After wandering so long in darkness, lead us to walk in the light of the sun.
After the falsehood of the current way, build a road for us by your Word.
And until you completely wipe out our fallenness, Lord, make us patient. Amen.*

Jesus Lives What He Teaches – Prayer and Temptation (Matthew 26:36-46)

Jesus provides a real-to-life application of this phrase in the Lord’s Prayer as we observe him in Matthew 26. The episode is reported to have taken place on the Thursday of the first Holy Week.

When Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." Jesus fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (From Matthew 26:36-42)

Jesus, was in the Garden of Gethsemane knowing that he soon would go to a cross and experience not only physical death – but, in dying, he will also carry the punishment for the sins of the world. **Jesus was aware of the indescribable suffering** that he would have to go through. But, **more than that, he knew he had a choice to make**: a choice between going through with this crucifixion or avoiding it. He was facing a trial that brought with it a deep temptation. Jesus actually was wrestling with the possibility of escaping what he knew his Father had called him to do. He had to choose between his Father’s will and his own will. When we see Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, we see a man with a decision to make! “My will” or “the Father’s will.”

Twice he tried to get comfort from his friends and twice he found them asleep. **Jesus’ words in vv. 40-41 are so significant: “Could you not watch with me for an hour? Watch and pray that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak.”**

You see Jesus, at that very moment, was experiencing a collision between the desire for obedience and the desire for escape. He wanted to do the will of the Father. But he also wanted to avoid the cross. Which did he want more? That was the issue. Would Jesus pray, “My will be done” or “Father in heaven, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”?

Remember the earliest days of human history when the “**first Adam**” had stood in a garden and faced a **similar choice**. But Adam had chosen “my will be done.” Made in the image of God, he wanted equality with God. He wanted “my kingdom come” -- not God’s. So, when the serpent tempted him with, “*You shall be like God,*” Adam disobeyed God and grabbed the forbidden fruit. The result of his decision? Cosmic disaster.

In Matthew 26, we see the “Second Adam” in a garden. He bears the untainted-by-sin image of God. He has the opportunity to reverse his predecessor’s failure. But, to do so, he had to follow the call of his Father.

What would he do? Jesus was fully God but he also was fully human. **Where would Jesus find the strength to make such a costly decision?** Let me tell you this: Jesus was really tempted here. Jesus was not play-acting in the Garden of Gethsemane. He had a real decision to make. If he would die on the cross and bear our sins, it would be because he resisted the temptation to escape and made a personal decision to obey his Abba in heaven. So, let me ask you: **“Why did Jesus make the right decision in the Garden of Gethsemane and Adam make the wrong one in the Garden of Eden?”**

The Bible gives us the answer three times:

* **V. 39:** “*Jesus fell to the ground and prayed.*”

* **V. 42:** “*Jesus went away a second time... and prayed.*”

* **V. 44:** “*Jesus went away a third time and prayed.*”

And the Bible tells us that **each time he prayed the same thing**. “*My Father, if it is possible, may this cup pass from me. Yet not as I will but as you will.*”

The Bible lets us know that Jesus made the right decision in the midst of temptation because he prayed. He prayed the kind of prayer that he taught us to pray – and that we have been studying throughout this Lenten Season. The Garden of Eden is conspicuous for its lack of prayer. Adam didn’t want to acknowledge God’s presence because Adam wanted to go his own way. But in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed.

And out of his blood-inducing prayer on our behalf, Jesus urges us to be people of prayer. **“Watch and pray that you will not fall into temptation.** Know this: **Above all things, prayer is a seeking to be led by God so that we might do his will rather than our own.**

So, until God finishes his work in us and in this world, don’t be surprised by the tests, trials and temptations that fill your world. When you leave church today they will be there. So, let me tell you this:

1. Each day you live in this imperfect world will be a day that you will face trials and temptations.

2. As you do, the decisions between right and wrong you face will involve struggle. Doing right is still not easy. Breaking addictions is not easy. You can’t do it on your own. Following Jesus when all your family and friends mock at you is not easy. Don’t be surprised by trials and temptations. No one was a better “Christian” than Jesus – but overcoming temptation and making the right choice was a struggle even for him.

3. The Lord Jesus will understand the temptations you feel and will meet you in their midst. It’s not a sin to be tempted. Jesus was tempted. We Christians often are embarrassed to own up to the particular struggles and temptations we feel. “No other Christian has these,” we think. “Jesus would surely never have faced these,” we also think. Well, think again. Jesus understands the struggles you go through to see the will of God obeyed in your life. And, he will not leave you alone. He has given us the gift of prayer, a gift that acknowledges his presence in the mist of trials and temptations.

4. When you face temptation and have a decision to make, prayer is the key. It must be biblical prayer. Learn from Jesus that **prayer is not a way to get your own will done.** You can ask God for anything in prayer. But, true prayer always acknowledges that God is God. So, be honest and don’t try to hide when you are struggling. Bring your requests for daily bread to him. But, when you pray, acknowledge that He is the Lord. Pray, “I am following you, O Lord. So, as you led me, know that my heart’s desire is to stay away from those places where I fail. And wherever you lead me, deliver me from the evil that is in this world and that I am prone to give in to -- for Father, wherever you lead me, my prayer is, “Not as I will but as you will.”

“Lead Us... Deliver Us...” – Where are we at LAC most susceptible to temptation?

We should pray this prayer personally – but we should not ignore the “us-ness” of the prayer either. On the personal level, I ask myself, “Where do I keep failing when I go there?” Then I pray, “As you lead me, deliver me.” But we should ask the same question as a church family too. Because of that, I’ve been asking a lot of LAC people this week, “Where are we most susceptible to temptation as a congregation?” And, I keep coming to the main thing Jesus prayed for us just before he went to the cross:

“My prayer is not for them (my twelve disciples) alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me... May they be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (John 17:20-23).”

For several months now, I have been hearing rather consistently two kinds of concerns. One has said, “Lake is becoming too political. Pastor, why are you letting that happen?” The other has said, “Lake is not political enough. Pastor, why don’t you call us more directly to engage in the injustices of our world, whether abortion or discrimination, by working for political change?” And, the power of those concerns presents an equally powerful temptation, i.e., to leave the church family rather than to allow our Lord to guide us through it together.

I must confess to you today that I find it very hard to bring the Scriptures to bear upon the issues of our world – as I know I am called to do – in a way that does not promote or denigrate one political ideology or another. I need more wisdom than I have to navigate this. I do know that the evils of our world will not be eradicated by political change or military might but only by the power of God at work in and through his people. I believe that Jesus came to bring the kingdom of God into our lives and into this world. I believe that we gather as we do today to worship our Father in heaven in unity and to allow his kingdom to grow in us – continuing his work of delivering us from our own sinfulness. As he does, he sends us out to further that kingdom -- to offer the love of Jesus to those who need daily bread, and healing, and housing and deliverance from evil. I know he calls us to that because Jesus did that. And, as we do, we invite people to bring the kingdom of God into their lives by placing their faith in Jesus and becoming a part of the family of God. That’s the task what I want us to be about here in our church.

So, in whatever ways I may have preached unwisely or unclearly about such things and thereby led to disunity, I ask for your forgiveness. For the wisdom to proclaim the Word of God with confidence and conviction but without political affiliation, I ask for your prayer for wisdom and courage. And, I ask you to make a new personal commitment to bringing about the oneness of our church family. Please join me in this kind of prayer, “Lord, lead us not into the temptation of breaking what you have brought together by the blood of Christ. Deliver us and set us free to joyously give witness to you in this world. May we at Lake Avenue church be brought to complete unity so that this world might see and believe.”

Two Questions to Ponder:

1. Where are the places or situations in this world that you face deep temptation and failure? Do you long for deliverance? Are you ready to pray fervently for deliverance from evil?
2. Will you pray that God will do a mighty work of bringing our church to complete unity – and that he will use you to help accomplish that prayer.