

***Epiphany Sermon Series: "The Lord's Prayer"***

***Sermon Title: Please, Lord! Part 2***

***Matthew 6:7-13; Luke 11:1-4; Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Matthew 4:1-11; James 1:2-4, 12***

***Salem United Methodist Church***

***February 14, 2016***

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Today on Valentine's Day and the First Sunday in Lent we are concluding this study of the beautiful prayer Jesus taught us to pray. The Lord's Prayer is a prayer of love—a prayer that states God's love for us and our love for God. The Lord's Prayer is also a covenant prayer that binds us to God and God to us. Lent reminds us that we are covenant breakers while God is a covenant keeper. This is why we need a Savior and so Jesus includes in his prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen."

Last week Erin explained the forgiveness petition in the prayer. We ask for forgiveness for what we have done wrong in our past. The next petition asks God to protect us in the future. Before we get into this, here is a joke that ties these two petitions together. After searching for a parking space for some time, an exasperated driver finally parked in a "no parking" zone. He left this message on his car: "I've circled this block ten times, and I couldn't find a place to park. I have an urgent appointment and must keep it or lose my job. Forgive us our trespasses." When he returned to his car, he found this note: "I've circled this block for ten years. If I don't give you a ticket, I'll lose my job. Lead us not into temptation." When Jesus instructs us to pray for the future, he doesn't ask us to pray for good health, long life, or prosperity. He instructs us to pray for the possibility of doing wrong. Temptation can be defined as a desire or craving for something, especially something considered as wrong. This weekend many will show our love with the temptation of chocolate. This is a different kind of temptation than is in the two temptation stories in our scripture. The first temptation story in Genesis begins with God informing Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or God says if they do they will die. Have you ever been told not to do something? The very thought creates temptation. After a mother repeatedly told her child not to eat the cookies, she caught her child eating them. The child said, "I was just going to smell them, but one got caught on my tooth." Temptation can also mean the experience of being drawn or torn away from God. The serpent who was created by God uses this type of temptation. With just a little enticement from this creature, Adam and Eve are drawn away from God. They were not able to say, "No," to the serpent's coaxing, but chose to trust the serpent rather than trust God. With this temptation, Adam and Eve were drawn away from God and as a result they did not die, but they did become separated from God. Their temptation was an inducement to be disobedient to God.

Our second temptation story is the temptation of Jesus. This temptation is different from Adam's and Eve's. This temptation is a testing of Jesus' strength and loyalty to God. Remember the first verse? The Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. This event occurs after Jesus has been baptized and he is about to begin his ministry. Jesus needed to be tested or tried to see if he could remain faithful to his Godself in human form or would he abuse his divine power as a human. So the adversary tests him. Will he use his ability to work miracles to feed just himself? Will he abuse his power for selfish gain? Will he wield his power to obtain all the worldly kingdoms or will he remain faithful to the Kingdom of God? Who will he worship? God, himself, or will he follow the adversary whose goal is to continue to draw him away from God? Jesus has to decide what path he will take, what action he will carry out, and who he will become. As a faithful Son of God, Jesus passes the test with flying colors. He not only remains faithful to God and himself as he reminds the tempter with scripture who is followed. So when Jesus adds the phrase, "Lead us not into temptation," or as in some versions state, "Save us from the time of trial," Jesus knew that we would have times in life that would test our faith, times in which we have to decide what direction our lives will take, times in which our obedience to God would be tested, and times where we would have to choose between being drawn away from God or keeping our eyes on God. However, if we can endure the testing like Jesus did, and remain close to God, we will grow stronger and become more mature in our faith. The Apostle James wrote that we are to think of this type of testing as an occasion for joy. From these tests come endurance and we come to realize our blessings.

The next phrase, “deliver us from evil,” is not included in Luke’s version of the prayer. What is evil? One theologian quipped if evil was personified in the devil dressed in a red suit with horns and tail, he would be easy to identify. But identifying evil isn’t that easy, yet we know it when we see it or experience it. Genocides, concentration camps, tyrannies, terrorism, murders, violence, abuse of any kind are all examples of evil. Yet there is an energy, a force, at work within us and around us trying to pull us apart, trying to separate us from God. The first question asked in our Baptism liturgy (p. 34) asks if we reject the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the powers of evil, and repent of our sin. We respond with a yes, yet this energy at work within us continually tries to separate us from God, each other, and from what is good. One could say that to know what evil is presupposes that one knows what is good. Adam and Eve came to know what was both good and evil after eating of the tree of its knowledge. Can one define evil without defining good? Last weekend at ROCK several of us attended a session called Toxic Culture. In this session the youth were warned to be careful what songs they listen to, what videos they watch, and what video games they play. All of these can speak of or show explicit sex, glorify the taking of drugs and the drinking of alcohol, honor violence and indiscriminate killing. The speaker had data that listening to or watching these can lead our vulnerable youth into this kind of behavior. Our toxic culture by glorifying this kind of behavior leads our youth to this evil and as a result they are lured to harm themselves and others. We heard stories in which just one mistake ruined lives forever. The message was clear. It is easier to stay out of trouble than to get out of trouble. One definition of evil is the absence of God. God is absent from this toxic culture and our youth are being lured into this culture. The church’s ministry to our youth is vital in delivering them from evil. Through our youth group and our trips to work at the Appalachia Service Project, the church offers an alternative to this evil and teaches our youth to honor God and each other. Yes, we need to pray deliver us, our youth, our world from the evil that tries to separate us from God. But God in Christ is greater than all the evil in the world and has, is, and will overcome evil. With these four words, “Deliver us from evil,” we acknowledge that we cannot do this on our own, but we need God to deliver us from evil every day. With these words, we pray to be led to God.

The last phrase of the prayer, “For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen,” is not part of Jesus’ original prayer. The church added this phrase in the second century. The King James Version of the Bible is the only version that includes this phrase. So if Jesus is perfect, why would the church mess with his perfect prayer? Three reasons. One, they thought the prayer ended abruptly. Two, they didn’t want the prayer to end on the word evil. And three, Jewish prayers began and ended with praises to God. This prayer begins with praising, “Our Father,” so why not end it with a doxology or a praise, too, so the church chose words used often in the Psalms to honor God: Kingdom, Power, and Glory. As we did in the beginning of the prayer, in this phrase we again pledge our allegiance to God’s Kingdom. We acknowledge God’s creative, healing, and redeeming Power is greater than all economic, racial, media, and political power, and we give God the glory in all things. Not just for yesterday, today, or tomorrow, but for all time, forever. The prayer concludes with the “Amen” which signals the prayer is over, but also means that we are in agreement. We endorse what we have just prayed. We are committed, uniting our will with God’s will. With the “Amen,” we are saying, “Yes, may it be so.”

The Lord’s Prayer is a prayer of covenant renewal between God and us, all of God’s children. God promises to be in relationship with us like a good father is to his children. God promises to provide for our needs daily. God promises to forgive us, to lead us away from temptation, and keep us from the evil that ensnares us to sin. And we promise to look for and participate in God’s coming kingdom and God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. We promise to forgive those who have hurt us, who have sinned against us. This prayer is a prayer of promise. Praying this prayer is just the beginning of the promise. Living it is the challenge. This is why during this season of Lent, we are reminded that our life is finite. We come from dust and to dust we will return. Lent is a time in which we look at how we have kept our covenant with God or when we have broken it. Lent then becomes a time to repent, a time to turn away from evil and turn back to God, to believe in the Gospel. So we take this journey once again with Jesus to Jerusalem where his death on the cross and his Resurrection offers us the New Covenant of forgiveness and new life. Amen.

**Resources:** *The Lord’s Prayer* by Edward Bauman; *God’s Psychiatry* by Charles Allen; *The Lord’s Prayer for Today* by William Carl

