

# **“Lead Us Not into Temptation, but Deliver Us from Evil”**

**Luke 19:28-40; Isaiah 50:4-9a; Luke 22:63-23:56**

**Part VII of VIII in the Lenten sermon series,  
“The Lord’s Prayer”**

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From the Pulpit

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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“Lead us not into temptation,” Jesus’ Prayer says as an appeal to God. This word “temptation” is often lost to us. Neil Douglas-Klotz in his book *Prayers of the Cosmos*, translates the prayer best of all from the Aramaic, the original language of Jesus. “Lead us not into temptation,” translates: “*Don’t let us enter into that which diverts us from the inner purpose of our lives.*” In the Greek, the word “temptation” translates “*test.*” Here we meet temptation – not so much about our behavior which gets us caught up in evil, as it is about each of us having strength and resolve when being tested. Often, we hear, ‘*Lead us not into this time of testing*’ or ‘*this time of trial.*’

We have come to a great and uplifting truth. What we call temptation is not meant to make us sin. It is not even designed to make us fall. Temptation is designed to help us conquer sin and make us stand, make us stronger and better women and men. Temptation is not set-up to nurture our “badness.” Rather, it is what makes us good. It is not meant to weaken us, but through the ordeals and challenges of life’s times of testing, we emerge stronger, and finer and purer – like that tested by fire. We may fail in the test, but that’s all right. We all fail tests at times. It is not so much the penalty of being human, but the glory – or manifestation – of being human.

Let’s ponder temptation’s way. What is the source of our “testing?” Sometimes temptation comes from **FAR OUTSIDE** ourselves. We choose to take up with those whose behaviors and actions bring us no gain. They influence us in ways that lead us into trouble, when we were not in trouble before. Let’s call it the Pinocchio effect. We find ourselves tripping down an alley instead of dancing down an avenue. We are moving in the shadows and the light around us dims. These tempter’s snares can take many different forms. But, their influence cuts against what we know – in our heart – is right within us.

Often in a haze, we stumble. Often in the darkest night we fall.

Sometimes our testing comes **CLOSER** than that. It comes from **OUTSIDE** ourselves, but from those who love us the most. Of all the temptations this is the hardest to fight. While the first temptation comes through shadows, this temptation has the appearance of not meaning to harm us in the slightest way. You may feel called to a certain place or certain vocation or career. But to follow that path means abandoning the path that someone who really loves you a lot has declared as your path. So, they begin to project to you what

should be. To follow that path may be unpopular with your family and friends. Family counsels, cautions, dissuades you from the path to which you feel called. They want you to do well in a worldly sense, but something different than you feel divinely called to do. That's striking and stirring you inside. Maybe they say, "Do what we want," or "Do it our way." But they do it out of love. But in such times, you find the light inside you going out, something inside of you begins to die because you have listened to the tempting voices close at hand. Temptation can come from those very close to us.

But Temptation always comes – at some level or another – from **INSIDE OURSELVES**. If nothing inside of us could respond to temptation's appeal, then temptation would be helpless to defeat us. Every one of us has some weak spot, some "button to push" which points out our vulnerability. Each of us has different vulnerable points. What tempts one person leaves the person beside him or her completely unmoved or unaffected. They hear what is bugging that person, but they can't even figure it out.

In every person, this "Achilles heel" or the weak spot, is tempter's delight. Whatever the flaw, the fault of passion, the instinct, the quirk, the trigger, the challenge – whatever it is – you need is to be aware and on guard to keep it in check. Like our fingerprints, each of us has a distinctive draw toward some temptation. For one person this may be a dream of glory, a lust or a craving that carries a person beyond himself or herself. For another, this trigger in the heart and mind may be a temptation to never reach or stretch or try for something higher or further beyond what is safe.

Carl Jung referred to the "other side of self" as the "shadow."

In Jungian psychology, the shadow or shadow aspect is a part of the unconscious mind consisting of repressed weaknesses, shortcomings, and instincts. He wrote:

*“Everyone carries a shadow and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the denser it is.”*

According to Jung, *“the shadow, in being instinctive and irrational, is prone to projection. That is, we turn a personal inferiority into a perceived moral deficiency or flaw in someone else. If these projections are unrecognized, the projection-making factor then has a free hand and can realize its object – if it has one – or bring about some other situation characteristic of its power.”*

He goes on, *“When we are tempted into projections on others, these projections insulate and cripple us, by forming an ever-thicker fog of illusion between our egos and the real world”* (drawn from Wikipedia on Carl Jung and The Shadow).

Simply put, what we struggle within ourselves we can project onto the other as wrong in them, when in fact, it is our issue, our struggle, our challenge. The temptation is still inside us, but it shows itself outside ourself. Temptation can come from within us. If temptation doesn’t come from outside ourselves, from those close to us, when we are young or from inside ourselves at our most vulnerable point, we can find ourselves tempted at our strongest points, which is the paradox of temptation.

History is filled with examples of castles that fell because no guard was placed at the strongest section of the wall; or more specifically, a ship, 110 years ago on April 14, that had gone into the icy waters of North Atlantic waters – where it should not have been. But, it sailed there because everyone said, “Nothing can sink the Titanic.” Do you

see how this works? What is the biggest part of your protection? What is it that sinks you because you believe you are impenetrable? Watch out. Be on guard.

Temptation is something we ask God to lead us out of every time we pray the Lord's Prayer. It is there for us in every imaginable way in every day. Perhaps we would do well to simply learn a few defenses against it – because it has an inevitable presence.

First, learn to love and respect yourself. Learn to say “no” to things that tear you down and “yes” to things that build you up. It sounds so simple. And maybe it is. Time and time again in the scriptures Jesus is faced with the Tempter, the Devil (you know, the “one who seeks to trip him”). He is the one who trips you. Jesus has a response to this. He says, “BE GONE,” “GET OUT OF HERE.” “LEAVE ME ALONE.” Every time Jesus says this, he leaves. But he leaves the way flies at a summer picnic leave the table. He flies around and comes back. Jesus knows that. But you just have to keep after it.

Second, trust the strength of your roots and traditions. Where you come from really has shaped you. The foundations of our lives are real and really matter. Hang on to them. If, however, you have no roots and traditions, may I recommend some? Get anchored in the power of prayer, the glory of God's word and the presence of worship. Jesus is a rock upon who you can build your life of faith. Jesus calls us to travel with him through the valley of the shadow and fear no evil, for he is with us. If you need a rock, roots and tradition, I highly recommend Jesus!

In defending against temptation, I also encourage everyone to seek a good therapist or a good spiritual director – or both. Some of us call ourselves stoic. We believe we can figure everything out all by

ourselves. Left to the devises and desires of our own hearts and minds, we think we can work everything out by ourselves. We often think we can work out our own salvation. But we learn pretty quickly in scripture and in life it doesn't work that way. In reality, the stoics became extinct for a reason.

We all need a listening ear and a questioning voice. Seek a healthy person who has dedicated himself or herself to spiritual and mental and emotional health and well-being – and listen to them and work with them. In overcoming temptation in the desert, Jesus vanished his tempter with “BE GONE!” but he was also ministered to and saved by angels who came to him and cared for him. Even the Son of God didn't make it on his own.

What makes us think we are better than Jesus? Seek the angels whose hearts and minds are present and loving. Also, listen to family and friends. While we discovered earlier, they may lead us away from discovering our true calling, they are also the ones who have been there for us from the earliest days of our lives. Trust that they care more deeply about you than sometimes they even know. Finally, remember in facing temptation that you are never alone. Jesus is more than a heroic figure in an old book. He is our rock and our salvation.

**Let me say a few words about “Deliver us from Evil” and then sit down.** In his book, *People of the Lie*, Dr. Scott Peck describes evil as “*that force residing inside or outside of human beings that seeks to kill life or liveliness. Goodness is its opposite. Goodness is that which promotes life and liveliness.*” (M.S. Peck, *People of the Lie*, Touchstone Books, New York, N.Y., 1983, p. 43).

**Evil is that force which kills life and liveliness.** Think about this.

At the end of his prayer, Jesus calls out to his father, “*Ela patzan min bisha,*” “*Deliver us from evil.*” Here in Aramaic, “evil” is best translated “*unripeness*” or “*inappropriate action.*” Jesus is asking his Abba, his daddy, his Father, to deliver his followers from that which diverts their attention, that which keeps them from advancing, that which keeps them from doing the right action at the right time.

What is it that you and I do that is not fruitful? What is it that we do that is inappropriate action? What do you do that diverts your attention from goodness, that keeps you from advancing, that keeps you from doing the right thing at the right time?

From THAT presence – the one that creates fruitless lives and inappropriate actions, Jesus prays we are ALL delivered from THAT presence. All get delivered from THAT.

In his little book, *The Lord's Prayer*, Catholic priest and liberation theologian Leonardo Boff writes that the evil of our times from which we need to be delivered is extreme individualism and a lack of compassion. I would add – it's politics of power that feasts on lies, and stomps on truth and facts and follows narcissism as a way of life. In times that nurture this madness, you and I have to be aware of our own sense of personal entitlement and collective selfishness.

With such erosion of our connections to others and our need to care for them, Boff says we shouldn't be surprised when evil comes around. He writes:

*Each generation has its own 'evil one' against which it must particularly protect itself and because of which it must implore divine protection. This evil being embodies the widespread wickedness that permeates humanity. . . . When 2/3's of the world's population is held prisoners under a legion of*

*demons: hunger, sickness, disintegration of the family, shortage of housing, schools, and hospitals ...the evil one has taken hold and will not let go. But the evil one looks a lot like people we know.* (L. Boff, *The Lord' Prayer*, Orbis Press, Maryknoll, NY, 1975, p. 119).

Looking out on the faces of his own time, Jesus saw this presence. He had been tormented by Satan while fasting in the wilderness. He was assaulted by good religious people every time he tried to deliver people from sickness and death.

In this week we call holy, Jesus faces Evil beyond belief. As he taught his beloved community to pray, he knew what they were facing. He knows what we are facing. The force from which we need to be delivered, the force which keeps us from doing good and keeps us away from one another is a force which holds humanity. It must be broken. It must be destroyed. His final petition to God in this prayer reverberated through Palestine in his time and shakes the earth to this day. ***“Deliver Us From Evil.”***

Today, we enter the week called *transitus*. From Latin, “transitus” means “the movement from one place to another.” Our Holy Week rituals will move us from the festive songs and celebrations of Palm Sunday, to the Passover Seder and prayerful loneliness of Maundy Thursday, to the Passion of Christ on Good Friday, to the silence of the tomb on Holy Saturday and to Christ’s glorious resurrection on Easter.

At the center of this movement, we find our Savior battling with demons and humans while being ministered to by angels and humans. He needs deliverance from evil. He needs God to hear and answer his prayer. Yet, in this week, it is the silence of God and the evil or

“inappropriate action” of people that will hold this week together in great dis-ease. The silence and the evil are finally broken by the glory of His rising.

All of this said, we must acknowledge and face the presence of evil in our times (and in every time), for it is truly that which keeps us from doing the right thing. Remember, the word “Satan” simply translates “the one who trips us,” “the one who causes us to stumble and fall.” If we do not deal with that which trips us, the power of darkness will grow and we will be dealt with on different terms. We will find ourselves lying face down with no ways to rise again.

*“Deliver us from Evil,”* he says.

The rest of the prayer awaits us next week. Amen.