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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Good Friday, April 19th, 2019

Sermon: Deliver Us from Evil (Seventh Petition)

Text: Matthew 6:13b

Focus: Jesus rescued us from sin, death, and the power of the devil by his death on the cross.

Function: That they would trust and follow Jesus to the cross of Calvary.

Structure: Text-Application

Locus: “We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven” (SC, 7th Petition of the Lord’s Prayer).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus

Christ. Amen. “Deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:13b, ESV).¹

“What does this mean? We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven” (SC, 7th Petition of the Lord’s Prayer).

In his explanation of this final petition of the Lord’s Prayer, Martin Luther shows that we are cast into battle against the devil and his wiles. For this petition may be properly translated in one of two ways: either “Deliver us from evil,” that is, evil in general; or “Deliver us from *the evil one*,” that is Satan, or the devil.

Most moderns shy away from the second translation, even though it is the more literal and probably the better one. The idea of a personal devil is offensive to our scientific, naturalistic way of thinking. We are willing to allow that evil may lurk in the hearts of such notorious sinners as Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, and Chairman Mao. But the belief that Satan is an actual being trying to tempt and destroy us seems outlandish, even downright cartoonish,

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

conjuring up images of a little red man with horns and a pitchfork sitting on our shoulder and whispering wicked thoughts into our ears.

But we *are* engaged in a spiritual war, a pitched battle against the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. Devils and demons are real, not just the figments of our imaginations or an analog for mental illness. St. Peter writes, “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). And St. Paul instructs us:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:10-12).

The Apostles were certainly convinced that Satan is real—a clear and present danger, as it were.

But in this battle, we cannot stand alone. Jesus calls Satan a “strongman” (Matt. 12:29).

If we attempt combat with our own might, we will fail... and fall. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

“For it is of the very essence of temptation in the Bible that all my strength—to my horror, and without my being able to do anything about it—is turned against me; really all my powers, including my good and pious powers (the strength of my faith), fall into the hands of the enemy power and are now led into the field against me. Before there can be any testing of my powers, I have been robbed of them.”²

Even our strength—our will, our flesh, our faith—can become our enemy. In Romans 7, the

Apostle cries out, “Wretched man that I am! Who will *deliver* me from this body of death?”

(Rom. 7:24). His own flesh wages war against him. We cannot stand alone.

Thus, Paul tells us to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of *his* might” (Eph. 6:10).

Ever since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, “all temptation is temptation of Jesus Christ and all victory is victory of Jesus Christ.”³ The battle belongs to the Lord (Prov. 21:31). He is

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Temptation*, trans. Kathleen Downham (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1953; London: The Camelot Press Ltd., 1955), 10.

³ Bonhoeffer, *Temptation*, 46.

our Champion (Jer. 20:11). He alone can defeat the devil. Indeed, this is why Christ came: “to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

And so we pray for rescue, for that is what the deliverance means. “Deliver us from evil.” “Rescue us from the evil one.” We cannot save ourselves, so we must *be* saved from the lion’s mouth (cp. 2 Tim. 4:17).

Rescue does not always come in the way we would like or expect. God doesn’t just snap his fingers and make our trials or suffering go away. Sometimes the only way for the cup of suffering to pass is to drain it down to the dregs. Yet this is our comfort: “At the most perilous point in our life, namely, the place where we must do battle with the tempter for life or death, there Jesus stood too, there he stands *beside* us.”⁴ He also went *before* us. And we know that on the Last Day, our Champion will come, Christ will return, Jesus will rescue us from the world’s peril on the final Day of Judgment. As Paul writes, “Jesus... delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10).

The defeat of Satan began at the cross. God told Adam and Eve that one of her offspring would crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). Jesus is that offering, that holy seed, the promised Messiah who conquers Satan instead of Rome. He rescues us from every evil of body and soul by dying for our sins and rising again to give us eternal life. For without Christ’s crucifixion, we could never be forgiven and would never be saved. That’s what makes Good Friday so good! We have a tendency to turn Good Friday services into a kind of annual “funeral” for Jesus. Yet despite the subdued and somber tone, we should rejoice and celebrate, declaring the victory of Jesus! Good Friday is as much about *Christus victor* as it is about *Christus vicar*. Yes, Jesus died in our place and took our punishment for sin. But by his death

⁴ Helmut Thielicke, *Our Heavenly Father: Sermons on the Lord’s Prayer*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 134.

he also destroyed the power of sin, death, and the devil, making our rescue possible if only we believe and trust in his name.

Ironically, in order to accomplish this rescue, Christ himself first had to suffer apparent defeat. In order to deliver us, Jesus must first be abandoned. “Eli, Eli,” he cried, “Lema sebachthani?” (Matt. 27:46). My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Indeed, as Jesus died on the cross, his enemies taunted him: “He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Matt. 27:43). But Jesus was not driven to despair. He did not come down off the cross, and he kept faith in the Father, even in his horrible loneliness. For at the end, he prayed, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

Jesus’ ruin resulted in our rescue. But God did not abandon Jesus to death and the grave forever. “For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption” (Ps. 16:10). Death could not contain Jesus, and the devil could not keep him down. But that is a story for another day, the third day, as we know it.

We will not see the final victory until the Last Day when Christ returns. Until that day, the devil rages, trying to burn as much as he can before he is bound forever. But the devil’s days are numbered. “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven,” Jesus said after the Seventy-two reported back from their preaching mission (Luke 10:18). The devil may be a dragon, but he is a chained dragon (Rev. 20:2-3). And even though he roars like a lion, Jesus will one day break his teeth.

Jesus did battle when he died on the cross. The defeat of the devil began when Jesus declared, “It is finished” (John 19:30). So we pray, “Deliver us from the evil one.” Right now, this victory is difficult for us to see. Our vision is blurred by tears in the valley of sorrow, like a driving rain that forces you to look down instead of up. But Jesus died and rose again. And he

will come again in glory. Lift up your eyes. The dark clouds of Good Friday are breaking, and the sun will shine again. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever.

Amen.