

Streetsville United Church

Sunday, March 10, 2019

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“DELIVER US FROM EVIL”

Luke 4:1,2

I read of something that happened a few years ago in Quebec. The story didn't mention the town or city. Anyway, two brothers, Antony and Jerome, wandered off from their backyard and entered a local Toys R Us store. While amusing themselves Antony and Jerome slipped into a playhouse where they quickly fell asleep. When they woke up, the lights were out, and the store was closed. Well, what do you think two young boys would do, locked in a large toy store? While 150 adults searched for them, the boys were happily playing inside the store. They were discovered there by the store manager the following morning. Asked why the store alarm system didn't go off, a Toys R Us spokesman said: "They never tried to open the doors to leave." Two youngsters alone in a toy store--what a great temptation. It was like heaven on earth. No wonder they didn't want to leave.

We are all tempted. Jesus was tempted. Luke tells us that immediately after his baptism, Jesus - full of the Holy Spirit--left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. As I read that I thought of the petition Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil One." (which is what it actually says).

Thankfully, Jesus Christ does deliver us from the evil one. Indeed, Jesus Christ has already delivered us from the worst the evil one can do.

Now let's put away the picture of the evil one as a cartoon figure with a pitchfork, red suit and horns. Fred Craddock the preacher and Bible scholar tells us that "the Bible speaks of the power of evil in the world in several ways; tendencies within ourselves; a personal being outside ourselves, apparently a powerful angel gone astray; a cosmic power; and organized forces arrayed against the will of God. In many images or concepts Scripture agrees with experience that there is in us and among us strong opposition to love, health, wholeness and peace." It is no wonder Jesus has us pray, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one."

First, let us consider the evil one as the source of temptation.

Luke tells us that Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Spirit where he was tempted by the devil. God allowed his Son to be put to the test. But it was not God who tempted Jesus. No, it was the evil one who tempted him.

The Bible clearly tells us that God is not the one who tempts us. Now he may allow us to be tempted sometimes, because when we face temptation and pass the test, we are strengthened

for the next time it comes. How will develop integrity if we are not faced with the opportunity to cut corners and take more than we should? How will we develop a stronger faith if we are not tempted by doubts? How will you become a person of faithfulness if you are never tempted to be unfaithful? Testing can help build our character and our faith. So God may allow it but he is not the source of the temptation. James tells us. "When tempted no one should say, "God is tempting me. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone..."

When we pray "Lead us not into temptation" we are confessing our weakness to God. We know that there are some temptations so strong that we might be defeated by them. I can easily be tempted and defeated by a bag of ripple potato chips. But we're talking about temptations much more serious. So when we pray, "Lead us not into temptation" we are asking God to keep far us away from temptations that might prove too much for us, to help us give them a wide berth. We are confessing our weakness and seeking his help. But it is not God who tempts us. No, real temptation comes from the evil one. He is the source of temptation.

Now secondly, let's consider the goal of the evil one.

What is the evil one trying to accomplish? Why does he tempt us? Basically his goal, his aim is to separate us from God. And temptation is one tool in his toolbox.

In the wilderness, the evil one was trying to separate Jesus from the Father. He was seeking to undermine the close and intimate relationship Jesus had with God.

First, he said, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus had not eaten for forty days. He was famished. So the temptation must have been pretty strong indeed. Furthermore, if he could make bread out of stone for himself, he could do it for others. How popular Jesus would have been with the people. Free bread and plenty of it! It reminds me of politicians who promise plenty of free stuff. But to use his power in this way was not what God intended. Using it this way would have driven a wedge between Jesus and his Father. So Jesus resisted the temptation by quoting Deuteronomy, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Jesus would depend on the Father for the provision of bread at the proper time.

Now the evil one doesn't tempt us to turn stones into bread, because we couldn't do it anyway. Scripture does not deny our need for physical nourishment and renewal. But Scripture makes it plain that we also need the living God, above all. "One does not live by bread alone." Yet the devil tempts us into believing that we can be satisfied apart from God. He tempts us to believe that bread is all we need. He's already fooled untold millions into believing that "bread" – money and physical things, are all we need. He is constantly trying to draw us away from God.

Then the devil tempted Jesus by offering him authority over all the kingdoms of the world. Jesus would rule everyone and everything. He would have unlimited power. He would be able to usher in God's Kingdom now! But there was a catch. The evil one said, "If you then will worship me, you can have it all." But to do so would have certainly come between himself and God. Jesus knew that the power he was bringing to the world was not political power; it was the power of divine love revealed through a cross. Jesus would worship and serve no one but God. Again he

resisted Satan's temptation by quoting Deuteronomy, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."

The devil tempts us with political power, too. He tempts us to think that if we only get the right political structure in place, there will be peace and plenty in our time! And this temptation often works. Many people put their full trust in certain leaders or in political power. They almost worship them as a substitute for God. Leaders and political structures are necessary, but they are fallen; they have feet of clay and leave us disappointed in the end. Only God is to be worshipped. He alone is our hope for this world and the world to come. To put your ultimate hope in someone or something other than the true and living God is to become separated from him. And the evil one loves it when that happens!

Finally, the devil took Jesus up and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple. "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; surely God will bear you up by the hands of angels." Again this must have been a great temptation for Jesus. What popularity he would have; what a great demonstration of his trust in God, and his status as God's Son. At a word he could get God to do whatever he wanted. But Jesus knew that this would spoil his close relationship with his Father. He could pray to God but he could not tell God what to do; he did what God told him to do. So he quoted Deuteronomy once more, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

Last week we spoke about how God has made us in his image. But we are tempted to make God in our image or at least in the image of a bellhop – someone who does for us just we want him to do. And we don't even tip him! Rather than trusting God, we make bargains with him, "I'll believe in you and I'll follow your way if you do such and such for me." But God will not be bought so easily. And when we think God can be manipulated for our own ends, or when we think we will be protected even when we are deliberately disobedient and foolish, we become separated from God.

You see, the devil's temptations are not just about small things. They are big temptations. And they have one goal - to separate us from God and cause our ruin and destruction. So "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Finally, and most importantly, Jesus Christ does deliver us from temptation; in fact, he has already delivered us from the worst the evil one can do to us.

The experience of being tempted by the evil one was ongoing in Jesus' life. The biggest temptation he faced was to avoid the cross. He once called his dear friend Peter "Satan" when Peter suggested that the cross was not the way for the Messiah to go. But Jesus, with the help of the Holy Spirit, resisted even this temptation. He was obedient to the Father's will unto death, even death on a cross, for our sake. Not for his own. He had no sin to die for; he was dying to reconcile us to God and to bring us forgiveness and eternal life. Now the evil one rejoiced when Jesus died on the Cross. But three days later he was not laughing. For the Father raised him from the dead in a smashing victory over the power of sin and evil and death.

As we trust in Christ and walk with him, he does guard us and deliver us from temptation. Now my flesh is sometimes weak. There are temptations I give in to, more often than I would like. Thank God for his forgiving mercy and grace. But as William Barclay points out, we may not realize just how often the Lord helps us and keeps us from temptation. When we are tempted, Christ may bring the right Scripture to our minds. Or he reminds us of our commitments and our promises. And he helps us to use common sense. Don't put yourself in a position where you might be tempted to violate your marriage vows. Many have stumbled in that way. Be very aware of tempting circumstances and give them a wide berth. Be careful about what you watch and read and think about. Don't make yourself vulnerable. In many ways and circumstances the Lord delivers us from temptation, even when we may not realize it.

But here's the big thing. Jesus Christ has delivered us from the worst that temptation can do to us. And by us I mean we who have received Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. You see, the evil one is constantly seeking to separate us from God. But by his death and resurrection Jesus Christ has defeated the tempter's ability to do so. We can really believe Paul's words in Romans 8. "Neither life nor death nor any power in all creation is able to separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord." If you are in Christ by faith, then the evil one cannot separate you from God and his love. No temptations the evil one throws at us can separate us from God. That would be the worst he could do. But Christ's victory means he can no longer do that, even when we give into temptation. Now there are always consequences to giving in to temptation of course, which is why we take temptation so seriously. But Jesus Christ has saved us from the worst of those consequences. You and I cannot, simply cannot, be separated from God's love in this age or in the age to come. The evil one's ultimate power has been defeated. So as we pray "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," we also say, "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."