

Genesis 22:1-14  
Matthew 6:9-13  
Communion

14<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost  
Midway Presbyterian Church  
September 6, 2020

## **Dealing with Temptation**

### *Introduction to the Old Testament Lesson*

In our Old Testament Lesson today we have that haunting story of Abraham offering up his son Isaac as a burnt offering. In the first verse it is revealed to us that God was testing Abraham's faith. Listen to these words from Genesis 22:1-14...

### *Introduction to the Gospel Lesson*

In our Gospel Lesson we hear again the words of the model prayer by which Jesus taught his disciples to pray. Our focus today is on the last verse of the prayer. Listen again to these words from Matthew 6:9-13...

### *Sermon*

This is the seventh and next to last in our series of sermons on the Lord's Prayer. Next week we will look at the closing phrase, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever." But our focus today is on these two clauses: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

An adult realizes that the world is not a completely comforting place to live. There are forces within and without that would lead us astray and destroy us. Jesus met the forces of evil head on, in his life, and in his death. And what he is telling us in the Lord's Prayer is that in dealing with temptation and evil we have available the very help of Almighty God.

In a recent article, columnist Cal Thomas wrote of the lessons behind the fall of Liberty University President Jerry Falwell, Jr., over allegations of sexual misconduct and other behavior. He says that many Christians seek to improve humanity to little avail through political and

governmental structures, or the Christian Coalition, even the United Nations—much of which can be about fundraising and projecting an image of power and influence. But nations that forget history and abandon unchanging standards of virtue eventually decline.

Many Christians have found that prayer, more than anything else, helps them to overcome temptation.

Have we trials and temptations?  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged.  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
(*“What a Friend We Have in Jesus,”* v. 2)

Now, let us deal with the disturbing question which this petition evokes: “Does God lead a person into temptation?” From the beginning the early Church Fathers said, “No.” St. James the Apostle was dealing with this issue in his letter to the twelve tribes in the dispersion when he wrote,

No one under trial or temptation should say “I am being tempted by God;” for God is untouched by evil, and does not himself tempt anyone. (4:15b)

It is important to understand that in the Bible the word “tempt” has two meanings. It can mean to seduce into evil. But it can also mean to test. In our Old Testament reading this morning from Genesis 22, the word can be translated either way...tempt or test. But clearly God was not seducing Abraham into evil; he was testing him. In demanding the sacrifice of his only son Isaac, God was testing the loyalty and obedience of Abraham. Matthew 4:1 says, “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.” If we translate tempt as to seduce into evil, it would mean that the Holy Spirit was trying to seduce Jesus. But again, tempt here meant to test. As the New Revised Standard Version of Matthew 6:13 translates the Lord’s Prayer, “And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

To be sure, Jesus did experience temptation. The Epistle to the Hebrews affirms that our great high priest, Jesus Christ “in every respect has been tempted, as we are, yet without sin.” (4:15) Yes, Jesus experienced the full range of human vulnerability, without straying from his calling to be faithful.

To be human is to face temptation. Some temptations of an earlier time in our lives may have lost some of their power, but others can remain troubling as long as we live. An unexpected temptation can catch us off guard and find us vulnerable. False values and easy promises can attack and destroy us. Like Esau, we may be enticed to sell our soul for a bowl of porridge. And so we are right to pray, “Grant us strength to overcome temptation, to be delivered from evil. Do not leave us to ourselves to face temptation.”

Someone said, “It’s easier to *stay* out of trouble than it is to *get* out of trouble.” That is what Jesus is saying in this petition, “Lead us not into temptation.” This morning let me ask: Where is our focus? Is it on our fears, our problems, our weaknesses, our vulnerabilities? Remember Peter—walking on the water? As long as he had his eyes on Jesus, he was okay. But when he began to look at the waves and the water, he began to sink. So, in the words of the hymn:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
 Look full in his wonderful face  
 And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
 In the light of his glory and grace.  
 (“*Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus*,” refrain)

Swiss theologian Karl Barth says that what this petition is really about is that great temptation to deny our faith in Christ. Having once put our hand to the plow, the temptation is to turn our backs on the kingdom, to walk away from the furrow, leaving it broken, but unfinished.

Some of you may remember the story of *Barabbas*, in the 1950 novel by the Swedish author Par Lagerkvist. In the book there is a haunting scene. Barabbas, the bandit whose life was star-crossed with that of Christ, has become a Roman slave, and is transported to Cyprus, where he will work in the copper mines. There he meets an old Armenian slave named Sahak, a devout follower of the Messiah. Each slave in the copper mines wears a metal disk proclaiming that he belongs to Caesar. But Sahak has strange markings on the back of his disk, which spell out the name "Christos Jesus." Although he belongs to Caesar, his real allegiance is to Jesus Christ.

Professing that he too wishes to follow the Galilean, Barabbas asks that his disk be inscribed with the name of Jesus. Working secretly down in the copper mine, they scratch upon its reverse side the same markings that are on Sahak's.

But someone overhears and they are reported to the supervisor, who tells the governor of the island. Sahak and Barabbas are brought before him. He questions them about the markings. Sahak says they are the name of his God. The governor reminds him that Caesar is a god also, and warns him that having other gods before Caesar is punishable by death.

The governor questions Barabbas. Does he believe in this god whose name is inscribed on his disk? Barabbas shakes his head.

"You don't?" asks the governor. "Why do you bear his name on your disk then?"

Barabbas is silent.

"Is he not your god?" asks the governor. "Isn't that what the inscription means?"

"I have no god," Barabbas answers at last, so softly that his words are barely audible.

Sahak gives him a look of such despair and pain and amazement that it seems to pass right through him, into his inner self, even though he keeps his eyes averted.

Once more Sahak is questioned. Does he realize the consequences of wearing the name of his god?

“Yes.”

“If you renounce your faith, no harm shall come to you,” says the governor. Will you do it?”

“I cannot,” says Sahak.

The governor orders him to be taken away and crucified.

“Extraordinary man,” he says as he looks after him.

Then he takes a knife, and holding Barabbas’ disk in one hand, crosses through the name of Jesus.

“There’s really no need,” he says, “as you don’t believe in him in any case.”

And he commends Barabbas for being a sensible fellow, and orders that he be given a better job. And for the rest of his life, Barabbas wears the crossed-out name of Jesus.

The Lord’s Prayer is about the test of our faithfulness to Christ. “Do not let us succumb to the temptation to be unfaithful—to deny our Lord.” “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” *Sacramentum* is the Latin word from which *sacrament* is derived. In ancient Rome it was an oath that one made to the gods. The Roman soldier made an oath of loyalty to the emperor. When we celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, we pledge ourselves to our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord’s Prayer enables us to recognize our need for God’s help in dealing with temptation and evil, and all its accompanying darkness. It is a form of the cry of the father who brought his epileptic son to Jesus, and was asked if he believed. “I believe, help thou my unbelief.” “I have faith, help me where faith falls short.” (Mk. 9:24)

“Deliver us from evil.” And the witness of the scriptures is that God is the liberator from evil. The Israelites—liberated from Egyptian slavery. Jesus—in resurrection snatched from the jaws of evil. Paul—liberated from his blindness to Christ and his gospel. The same Paul declared in his letter to the Philippians,

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (4:13)

God is the liberator—who makes us free indeed. Who enables us to live the life to which he calls us.

My friends, we hallow God’s name when we speak reverently of him. We hallow God’s name as we seek bread, not only for ourselves, but also for others. We hallow God’s name by repentance and by forgiving those who have sinned against us. We hallow God’s name by overcoming temptation and evil. We hallow God’s name when we pledge our loyalty in the Holy Supper. And thereby do we bear witness that his is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. And Amen.