

“Deliver Us from Evil”
Job 1:1-12; James 4:1-8

The building of the Jackson First Presbyterian Church where I was pastor for 22 years served as a polling place for elections. When you drove into the church parking lot on an Election Day there were signs all over the place saying, “VOTE HERE”. There were candidates and signs of candidates barely observing the 100 foot electioneering rule all over the parking lot.

This was a day that I did not look forward to because the church office inevitably would receive angry phone calls from angry persons wondering why a church would apparently support one candidate over another. So, I decided that the church would have its own message for the election season and week for all to seem “Deliver Us from Evil,” the last time I preached on this part of our Lord’s Prayer!

The message is that one way of not being led into temptation was delivering ourselves from evil as much as possible by exercising our right to vote as informed voters.

When Jesus teaches us to pray, “Lead **us** not into temptation, but deliver **us** from evil,” this is a “we-oriented” prayer instead of a “me-oriented” prayer. Do you wonder about this?

Yes, God is concerned with our individual sins, but maybe, just maybe Jesus is saying that we should be more concerned, more worried about falling to “*mass temptation*” where an entire religious group or nation or culture is deceived by the Evil One.

Pastor Martin Niemoller was a Lutheran pastor and part of the confessing Church movement in Germany. He wrote about what can happen when an entire group of people fall to evil:

First they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out
because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for the Communists
and I did not speak out
because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out
because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for me
and there was no one left
to speak out for me.

“Lead **us** not into temptation, but deliver **us** from evil” is a choice that **we make** every day.

The Letter of James in the New Testament says that **temptation and evil can come from within ourselves.**

The J.B. Phillips translation of the New Testament puts the blame squarely upon us:

But about the feuds and struggles that exist among you—where do you suppose they come from? Can’t you see that they arise from conflicting passions within yourselves? You crave for something and don’t get it, you are jealous and envious of what others have got and you don’t possess it yourselves. Consequently in your exasperated frustration you struggle and fight with one another. You don’t get what you want because you don’t ask God for it. And when you do ask he doesn’t give it to you, for you ask in quite the wrong spirit—you only want to satisfy your own desires. (James 4:1-3, *The New Testament in Modern English*)

When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, “lead us not into temptation” we are really asking God, “Lord, do not put us to the test.” However, the truth is that every day each of us is put to the test. **Every day each of us will face small and sometimes large tests of character.**

If this is the case, why do we seem to be tested, tried, and tempted so much? Is it God who is testing us? The Book of Job gives us some guidance here...

The Book of Job attempts to answer the world’s oldest problem—why is there is evil if God is good? At first blush when we read the Book of Job the answer is a resounding—“NO, God is not the One who tests us; it is the Evil One who does that, the enemy of our soul. Nevertheless, God does

give him permission, yet he is on a short leash, and ultimately it is we who choose to submit to temptation or resist.

In Job Chapter One God said to Satan, “Have you noticed my friend Job? There’s no one quite like him—honest and true to his word, totally devoted and hating evil.”

Satan retorted, “So do you think Job does all that out of the sheer goodness of his heart? Why, no one ever had it so good! You pamper him like a pet, make sure nothing bad ever happens to him or his family or his possessions, bless everything he does—he can’t lose! “But what do you think would happen if you reached down and took away everything that is his? He’d curse you right to your face, that’s what.”

God replied, “We’ll see. Go ahead—do what you want with all that is his. Just don’t hurt him.” (Job 1:6-12, The Message)

I have heard it said by other Christians that “God will never give you more than you can bear.” I don’t believe that. I don’t believe that it was true for Job or is true for us. I think that **sometimes God does allow for us more than we can handle because it drives us to our knees, it drives us to the God who provides us strength that we don’t have!** There is a mystery here that can not be explained. God is not cruel yet loving. God is not weak yet allows temptation to come from the Evil One. Why?

Hildegard of Bingen was a German Benedictine abbess, writer, composer, philosopher, Christian mystic and visionary who lived in the 12th Century AD. She once wrote that, “A human being is a vessel that God has built for himself and filled with his inspiration so that his works are perfected in it.” This is why Jesus said that we should pray “Lead **us** not into temptation, but deliver **us** from evil.” It is so that his works are perfected in **us**.

Let’s go back to the beginning of this sermon where I told you the story about the two different signs on display on a Election Day—“VOTE HERE” and “DELIVER US FROM EVIL”. There is definitely a message for us here. It is that we are called to be wise and recognize what temptation is for us as individuals and as a society. And, we are also called not to give in, but to know every day is an Election Day for us and that every day every with God’s help we are not powerless to temptation and evil. Amen.