

***Lead us not into Temptation***  
Deuteronomy 8: 1-3; Matthew 6:9-13  
June 28, 2015  
Rev. Dr. Charles Parker

## **I. Introduction**

Every Christmas Eve we hear these wonderful words from Luke in which Luke tells us in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. So, this is the first taxation of the world under and took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And then Luke goes on to tell this story contrasting the reign of Augustus with the coming of Jesus. He is very clear to remind us that Augustus was the one that the world knew as the Bringer of Peace, the Pax Romana, the Roman Peace that created stability throughout the Mediterranean world. But it was a peace that was built on power and coercion that kept other violence at bay. And Luke contrasts that with the Prince of Peace that is being born in Bethlehem which takes place in each of our hearts.

Luke talks about Augustus as the Ruler of the World who has got all the power in his hands and contrasts that with this incredibly vulnerable baby being born in Bethlehem for whom the angels are singing. And he contrasts a kingdom that is based on power and violence with a kingdom that is based on reconciliation and love. And what Luke wants us to understand, as do all the Gospel writers, is that we find ourselves in a place where both of these kingdoms are at work and that we are called to give our allegiance to the kingdom that is led by Jesus.

We have been looking at the Lord's Prayer for the last several weeks and we started off this process looking at "Thy Kingdom come," here and we end today with the same theme, that the kingdom is a kingdom that we are called to give allegiance to and that that is going to in some very real ways bring us into conflict with the other kingdom that is competing for our allegiance.

This is a helpful reminder because it is very easy for us to start to treat our faith as the solution to our problems. If you're lonely and isolated, Jesus is there and loves you. If you are confused and searching, Jesus can give you discernment. And what our Gospel writers want us to understand is that while on some level that is true, we can't ever lose sight of the fact that following Jesus doesn't just solve all of our problems, sometimes it causes some problems that we would never have encountered if we weren't following Jesus with faithfulness, that we are going to encounter conflict on a level that we can't even get our head around because of our commitment to this new kingdom.

Theologian and Bishop N.T. Wright reminds us that, "Jewish visionaries from the early prophets right up to Jesus' day and beyond saw Israel's vocation in terms of a great buildup of pressure and pain. The night would get darker, and then when it was pitch black, when hope had died and fear had conquered, the morning star would dawn at last."

The kingdom of this world in scriptural terms stands in opposition to the kingdom of God. That opposition in places in scripture gets personified as Satan, in other places more generally as the principalities and powers that stand in opposition to God. But however you conceptualize this, the thing that you need to keep in mind, that we all need to keep in mind, is that there is real opposition, substantive opposition to the coming of the kingdom and that whenever we push and work on behalf of the coming of the kingdom, we're going to get a response. And many of you are well aware that sometimes it's when we seem to be making the greatest progress that the resistance and the response gets the most aggressive.

## II. Temptation

The last two petitions in the Lord's Prayer are both very directly dealing with this issue. "Lead us not into temptation," is a reminder that the first line of defense by the powers of the world is seduction.

We've been doing a week-long *Star Wars* marathon with Joshua this week and there's that iconic scene in which Darth Vader is kneeling before the hologram of the Emperor and the Emperor says, "Young Skywalker must not become a Jedi." And Darth Vader says, "If he could be turned, he will be a powerful ally." And the Emperor says, "Yes. Can it be done?" And right away we move into the seduction of Luke Skywalker, "Luke, the dark side is really powerful. You should give this a try." And then you've got the whole Darth Vader and Yoda paradigm of Yoda saying, "It's so easy to go down the dark side. Anger and fear and hatred." It's a seduction process.

And dear friends, the values that stand in opposition to the kingdom of God are very seductive and they seek to draw us from where God calls us, so the lure of wealth and comfort and power and acclimation all seek to call us from the place that God wants us to be and seduce us away from the kingdom in a way that has great, great appeal.

The wording of this phrase is a little bit challenging in that "lead us not into temptation" makes it sound like God is taking us to this place of being tempted and I don't think that is the case. There is an inevitability to the process of being tempted or seduced, that we can't actually I don't think avoid. Jesus couldn't avoid it. Jesus starts off his ministry, what's the first thing that happens after Jesus is baptized? He gets taken into the desert and tempted. It was before any of his teachings, before any of the healings. Temptation is the first part of the process. And how do we know this? Because nobody was out there with Jesus, right? He was there by himself. Jesus had to have told his disciples that he was tempted, which I think is an interesting idea. It means that Jesus wasn't interested in keeping Jesus' reputation pure. He didn't want to appear more than the disciples in that respect. He must've told them, "I was tempted," because "you're going to be tempted too and you better be ready for it.

So, this clause, "lead us not into temptation," I don't think is a petition to be kept away from seduction and temptation. It is our request that God strengthen us in those

moments of temptation so that we can continue with faithfulness on the walk that God has given us to walk.

### **III. Deliver us from evil**

So, Jesus' ministry begins with temptation and ends with violence, because for the powers and principalities that stand in opposition to God, when seduction doesn't work, violence and coercion is a good fall-back position. And Janet Craswell shared with us some very powerful pictures of what that looks like when work on behalf of justice and kingdom building comes into conflict with the powers that stand in opposition to that. If those powers cannot seduce us, if they can't turn us to the dark side, then they're going to make sure we stop fighting by any means necessary.

This is why so many of the great Christian allegories from the book of Revelation to Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* with Aragorn marching to the Gate of Mordor to C.S. Lewis' *Last Battle*, ultimately come to a place where the forces of the kingdom stand in very stark and often violent opposition to the forces of this world.

Bishop Will Willimon writes that, "In the Middle Ages, the church showed its wisdom by placing statues of the martyrs at the front door, the portals of the church. In this way, the faithful were welcomed into the church with scenes of decapitation, bloody swords, and suffering servants of God because the servant up front needed to portray the cost of discipleship."

### **IV. Conclusion**

We stand in stark opposition to powerful forces and when we engage those forces, we can expect a response that has the potential to be violent and coercive. Which is to say that when we claim allegiance to this kingdom of God, we go in with eyes wide open. "Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from the power of evil," are petitions that tell God that we understand that we face powers that are beyond us and need the power of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us in that battle. It's an invitation to persistence that whenever we work on behalf of the cause of justice and peace, we know that we're in for the long haul and that work keeps continuing. We make little bits of progress. We get pushed back. We keep the fight going.

In his eulogy to Reverend Clementa Pinckney this past Friday -- which if you haven't seen it, I would encourage you to take a look at, very powerful preaching by our president -- Mr. Obama said, "that once the eulogies have been delivered and once the TV cameras move on to go back to business as usual, that's the temptation, that's what we so often do to avoid uncomfortable truths about the prejudice that still infects our society." "To settle for symbolic gestures," he says, "without following up with the hard work of more lasting change, that's how we lose our way. It would be a refutation of the forgiveness expressed by those families if we merely slipped into old habits whereby those who disagree with us are not merely wrong but bad, where we shout instead of

listen, where we barricade ourselves behind preconceived notions and well-practiced cynicism."

The last two clauses of the Lord's Prayer are a call to us to invite in the power of the Holy Spirit so that we can persist in the struggle to bring about God's kingdom, to bring about a world of justice and peace, to, like Mary, choose the pain of labor to birth a new world.

The Lord's Prayer is Jesus' primary teaching about what it means to pray to God. It is a window into who Jesus was and how Jesus understood his ministry and understood his relationship with the father and mother that brought him forth. It's a prayer I want to encourage you, if you don't do it, to offer every day, and not just running through the words as we so often do but really taking the time to unpack and reflect them. There's such meat and such depth here that we have the gift to experience on a not-just-every-week basis but an everyday basis. And as many of you know, there are traditions that repeat the Lord's Prayer over and over again during the day. It's a great gift that I want to encourage us to claim as we keep ever mindful of the kingdom that is God's "for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory," it's all God's. And our affirmation of amen is our promise that we are living out of that kingdom, that our allegiance is to that kingdom and not to all of the seductive powers and principalities around us, and that as we commit ourselves to that vision, that kingdom becomes real, here and then everywhere.

Amen.