

Aldersgate UMC of Butte, MT

2nd Sunday in Lent

Sunday, February 28, 2021

Background to Scripture

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During the past year with social and political upheaval, temptations of one kind or another, have been on the rise. If we are honest, we have been tested again and again with all kinds of things that have tempted us to do things or to say things we would not say or do normally. Today, we will be pondering what it means to say, “and lead us not into temptation,” as if we needed God to do that. This slide will illustrate the point:

Again, why would we worry about God leading us into temptation, when we have plenty on our own. There are so many temptations that are not healthy for us and here is one you may not have thought of from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: *“Never succumb to the temptation of bitterness.”*

With all the hardship of this past year, it would be easy to be bitter about all that people have endured during this pandemic and my hope is that the Lord’s Prayer will empower us to be disciples of Yeshua. In today’s reading of scripture, I will invite you to share in this responsively:

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 6:9-13 (responsively)

Our Father in the heavens,
Your name be revered.

**Impose your imperial rule,
enact your will on earth
as you have in heaven.**

Provide us with the bread
we need for the day.

**Forgive our debts
to the extent we have forgiven
those in debt to us.**

And please don't subject us
to test after test,
but rescue us from the evil one.

Jesus Seminar Translation

The Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

Message

(notes to message)

“And Lead Us Not Into Temptation
But Deliver Us from Evil”

Wela tahlān l'nesyuna

Ela patzan min bisha

Don't let us enter forgetfulness
But free us from unripeness.

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A mother was teaching her three year old daughter the Lord's Prayer. For several evenings at bedtime, she repeated it after her mother. One night she said she was ready to solo. The mother listened with pride, as she carefully enunciated each word right up to the end ..._“and lead us not into temptation,” she prayed, “but deliver us from email, Amen.”

This is probably the part of the Lord's Prayer I have the most difficulty with.

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil or deliver us from the evil one.”

Why would God lead us into temptation in the first place. What is that all about? Many of us as followers of Yeshua have a difficult time imagining a God that would tempt us with evil.

Actually the Aramaic, which is the language that Jesus spoke, helps us out a great deal here. The most misunderstood line here *“lead us not into temptation”* is confusing because in the Aramaic no one outside of us *“leads us into temptation”* least of all God.

Wela tahlán could be translated “don’t let us be seduced by the appearance of” or “don’t let us enter.”

Nesyuna could be translated as “temptation,” but in the Aramaic it means something that diverts us from the purpose of our lives such as the seduction of materialism or even spiritual materialism. Kyle Idleman in “not a fan” once again refers to those who like Jesus and are fans of Jesus, but do not really love Jesus or follow Jesus. Kyle asks this very provocative question: **“Am I a fan of Jesus or am I a follower of Jesus?”** We will come back to this a bit later.

Ela patzan min bisha was translated, *“but deliver us from evil.”* What is most interesting is that in the Aramaic *bisha* does not mean “evil” or “error” but means **“unripeness”** or what is said to be inappropriate action. **What is holding us back?** What is keeping us from who we are called to be and what we are called to do seems to me to be the bottom line. In previous sermons, we heard the power of compassion that results in forgiveness and the work of justice where everyone has bread to eat. EVERYONE!

Neil Douglas-Klotz goes on in his book, *Prayers from the Cosmos*:

“ ... don't let us be deluded by the surface of life, but neither let us become so inward and self-absorbed that we cannot act simply and humanely at the right time.”

There are so many temptations we have in our modern society and the list is endless from minor temptations to major temptations.

Unfortunately, we have the world that says, eat, drink and be merry. No worries just have a good time. The world thinks of temptation in this fashion:

“Yield to temptation. It may not pass your way again. Robert A. Heinlein

Eat, drink and be merry may work for a time, but will you know joy from giving into temptation that can hurt yourself or someone you love?

I do not believe God would actually lead us into temptation as we learn from the Aramaic. Again, we learn from the Aramaic that we are asking not to enter into forgetfulness of who we are and who it is that lives within us. Hear this verse from I Corinthians 3:16-17: “Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ... For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Let's pause for just a moment to ponder this verse. *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?* Unfortunately we tend to forget this, for whatever reason. When we awaken to this reality, it changes something within us. It changes the way in which we live and move and have our being. Yeshua also had something to say about this that we tend to forget and this prayer is asking us not to enter into forgetfulness. Yeshua proclaimed to his disciples: “YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD!”

You are the Light of the World because God's Spirit dwells in you! When we awaken to this reality, we begin to ripen in our walk with God. As the prayer

goes, *“But free us from unripeness!”* The opposite of unripeness is to ripen in the fruits of the spirit:

Don't let us enter forgetfulness

But free us from unripeness.

When pondering this word, “unripeness” I was reminded of a litmus test in our walk with God from Galatians 5:22,23: *“But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”*

Most of us are familiar with the fruits of the Spirit and can ask ourselves, if we are ripening in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control? The easiest easy way to know whether or not we are actually ripening in the fruit of the Spirit is to ask the ones who know us best. If we are humble enough, our loved ones will let us know which ones are not ripening within us. For example, one of the greatest litmus tests in whether or not we are growing in the fruits of the spirit is *“patience”*. Ask yourself, *“Am I growing in patience?”* Yes, even in the midst of a pandemic, we can grow in patience *by the grace of God!* I suspect that if you are growing in patience, you may also be growing in love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Lastly I would ask about one other fruit of the spirit and that is whether or not we are growing in faithfulness? Faithfulness to what, you may ask?

When I asked myself this question, my mission statement came to mind which is: *“What does God require of you, but to seek justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”* Micah 6:8

Knowing that Yeshua was tempted in the wilderness actually helps me find some comfort that even Jesus was tempted. Yeshua was tempted to use his power inappropriately. Jesus was tempted to turn stones into bread

because he was famished. Yeshua's second temptation was that if he was the son of God, he could throw himself down from the temple and no harm would become of him. The third temptation had to do with worshipping Satan rather than God. Each time Jesus had a response and remained steadfast in the commitment to remaining faithful to God

The bottom line for me is that when we enter into the Lord's Prayer, we become the Lord's Prayer in the world. This is different from those who practice churchianity. Kyle Idleman speaks to this as fans of Jesus who may like the Lord's Prayer for comfort and tradition, but have no real intention of living out the Lord's Prayer 7 days a week. Fans of Jesus feel good about reciting the Lord's Prayer and going through the motions of their religion, but it does not change the way in which they live and move and have their being.

Folks who live into the Lord's Prayer become the Lord's Prayer in the world and go beyond being a fan of Jesus to being a follower of Jesus. Being a follower of Jesus is striving to be Jesus in the world for we remember all too well, that whatever you did to the least of these you did it to me.

Each and every time I meditate on the Lord's Prayer, something new and fresh brings the prayer alive. This week, it was this in the Lord's Prayer that struck me and struck me hard:

“And Lead Us Not Into Temptation
But Deliver Us from Evil”

Wela tahlán l'nesyuna

Ela patzan min bisha

Don't let us enter forgetfulness

But free us from unripeness.

May we never forget who we are -- the Temple of God called forth to bear fruit! Amen and so be it!