

The disciples ask Jesus, “teach us to pray.” And we get the Lord’s prayer, which we also pray every Sunday.

This morning I’d like to do some reflecting with the petition “do not bring us to the time of trial.” In the translation we use we say “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Once in a while, someone will ask me, what does that mean, this “Lead us not into temptation?” What’s that all about?

In the small catechism Luther responds to this question by saying:

“It is true that God tempts no one, but we ask in this prayer that God would preserve and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice, and that, although we may be attacked by them, we may finally prevail and gain the victory.” That’s Luther for you, pretty unquotable...

I guess, for me this petition boils down to three things. First of all is recognition that God is not the tempter. God wishes for us to live peacefully and in harmony with one another. God is in the reconciliation and forgiveness.

Secondly, this petition acknowledges that sin, the trials and temptations of our lives, are a constant reality. And finally, for me this petition is a declaration that God has the final victory over sin and death; although sin is our context it is not our destiny.

Trials and temptations come at us in many different ways and shapes. We typically think of sin in terms of breaking rules. But I invite you to think about sin in terms of missing the mark. If we live our lives well and hit the mark, generally speaking, good things happen for us. And conversely, if we live our lives in a manner that misses the mark, generally speaking, difficult things happen, not only for us, but for others around us. We're all interconnected.

From my perspective, the root cause of all sin is human desire. It's that place in our heart that simply "wants." It's just plain old covetousness... You gotta have this, You gotta have that... Human desire that gets out of hand leads to problems, rivalry and conflicts.

Many of the Ten Commandments concern themselves with putting brakes on human desire. The ninth and tenth commandments specifically concern themselves with covetousness; "keeping up with the Joneses." It's about the desire to possess what our neighbors have.

Quick story... I had a neighbor in Austin, who owned a lot of motorcycles, primarily Harley Davidsons... And for years I watched him come and go, and boy I began to be so jealous of him. It looked so much fun, the freedom of the open road, the wind in your hair. Well, that was the beginning, I started imagining myself on a motorcycle.

Well, guess what, the temptation was too strong. I've now owned three motorcycles since then. And every once in a while, when I'm driving around and I see a new BWM motorcycle, oye, I'm so tempted. Do I need one? No! Do I want

one? Oh man... And don't get me started on Guitars! Uffda! Covetousness is powerful stuff!

You're probably wondering, what's the big deal about wanting a new motorcycle. Frankly, nothing if I could afford it. However, it would be a big problem if I couldn't afford it. Money is always about choices. If you give in to all your wants, will there be money for the things you need? Like groceries, or paying the utility bills, or medications?

What if I bought a big house and couldn't afford it? What if half of our country bought big houses and couldn't afford them? It would affect the economy, right? When we miss the mark, generally speaking, bad things happen. And not only for us, for others around us as well.

We not only covet things; we also covet people. Or, perhaps I should say we covet things about people, we covet their skills, like musicians or actors or athletes. This is fundamentally what celebrity is. This kind of covetousness always leads to a love/hate kind of relationship. In mimetic theory it's known as a model / obstacle.

When we desire to be like a particular person, we're also a "tinsy" bit jealous of that person. On one hand we want to be like a person, and on the other hand we're not that person, and so we're jealous. We put people on a pedestal, and then at the same time we try to knock them off.

I've played guitar since I was a kid. Through all those years I've had many different model/obstacles. I've wanted to play guitar like Eric Clapton, or Brad Paisley; my list goes on and on. Lately my new model/obstacle is Joe Bonamassa,

a blues man... I would love to be able to play like him. And truth is, I spend hours every week playing guitar, imitating him and driving Kris crazy! Bonamassa is an amazing blues player.

On one hand I love him and how he plays, on the other I'm jealous I'm not him. What a conundrum!

It's this love/hate thing that explains our fascination with celebrity. We love our movie stars, and we also love to talk about them when they have problems. The whole paparazzi thing... Ever wonder why we have People magazine and the National Enquirer... As Brad Paisley says, "When you're celebrity, it's adios reality."

Did you ever have any idea this was all about covetousness? Temptations are everywhere...

Luther is right-- we are constantly attacked by trials and temptations. And the truth is—much of the time we're not even aware of it, it's so subtle and cunning. Sin is our context, it's in the air we breathe... As Lutherans we tell the truth, and the truth is... "we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves." Which is why we have confession and forgiveness every Sunday...

Thank goodness for the gospel. For me, the third meaning of Luther's explanation to this petition is that yes although we are mired in these trials and temptations, we ask that God prevail over them.

Prayer itself is an important way that God works in us and through us. Prayer is intensely personal. Some of us pray while we're going to sleep at night. Some of us pray under our breath. And we all have different pain, grief or despair that we live with, and so we all encounter God with unique life experiences.

We may all come to prayer differently. And yet, in prayer, we encounter God. We come into God's presence, and when we hear ourselves in conversation with God, we begin imagining how God is hearing us. This shift creates a certain new kind of awareness.

Over time we begin to recognize what belongs to our own selfish wants and desires, and we also begin to recognize what it is that God desires for us. And you see it's different... And that new perception, changes us, it transforms our temptations.

For instance: Instead of asking God for a new motorcycle, I ask God to help me make wise financial decisions. Instead of asking God to let me win the lottery, I ask God to teach me how to be generous to others... Instead of asking God to teach me how to play guitar like Joe Bonamassa, I ask that God give me opportunities to teach others... Instead of asking God to change those other people over there, I ask God to change me... Instead of asking God for easy miracles, I ask that God might give me strength to do miraculous things.

Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." Ask, search and knock... It's a process, and the magic is not in the appearance of everything we covet, but in the transformation of our hearts for God and for one another.

Jesus says, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

The good news today is that we have been given the Holy Spirit... When we ask God not to lead us into temptation, we ask that God would transform our temptations, and that’s exactly what God does. Prayer is about miraculous change, and from the inside out.

Through every single loving, kind and gracious thing we do, we are the miracles that God is working in this community and for the sake of the world.

Amen.