

**Deliver us from Evil**  
**September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

**Matthew 6:13b**  
**Pentecost 13 A**

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Today we come to the last petition, the last request that Jesus teaches us in the Lord's Prayer. Not quite the end of the prayer we're used to praying, but the last thing Jesus tells us is important to pray for. Now if you were to read this petition literally from the original Greek text you would come out with a statement like this: **"Deliver us from the evil."** "The evil." What's that? Well that sort of talk is used in the Greek language where we might add just one word to make it clearer and say, **"Deliver us from the evil one,"** namely then, from Satan. The more general translation that we see and use, **"Deliver us from evil,"** is just as correct, because it gathers up all of the sin and sorrow which is in this world *because* of the evil one, Satan, the devil.

Maybe to you, it's not so much a shock that I would speak about the devil as though he were a real thing. But, in most churches these days, you will hear little or nothing of Satan or the devil. *If* the subject comes up, most clergymen are quick to explain to their people that this Satan is just a sort of primitive image of evil influences in the world; that enlightened people today do not believe in some personal spirit being named Satan. That's just a medieval image of cloven hooves, red horns and flame and sulfur. *Educated* people wouldn't entertain the superstitious notion that there is actually an evil one behind the evil, a liar behind the lie, a murderer of souls behind the murders. For them, to claim the existence of Satan, the devil, is to lose all credibility.

Yet Christ himself was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, says the Bible. Three times he rebuked the evil one with, **"It is written."** He addressed Satan as a person, saying, **"Get behind me, Satan."** Jesus said to his disciples, **"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."** On countless occasions, Jesus addressed real demons and drove them out. According to the enlightened religious leaders of our day...Jesus must not have known any better!

Or is it that we, as children of our times, do not see the proof of Satan today because we don't have the spiritual eyes to see it – because we let doctors diagnose and excuse every dysfunction of the human condition, we pin clinical labels on all sorts of things which used to be seen as problems of sin and the soul, problems that truly stem from the inner life which only God can deal with? Does giving it a medical name and excuse mean Satan is not operating there?

Do we really have a reason to doubt that Satan is working hard in our world and in the people? Look over the history of the last century and ask if Satan isn't at work. Look at the wars and the cruelty of men like Hitler, Stalin, bin Laden, and hit-and-run-terrorist? Watching the news becomes an exercise in seeing what tragedy occurred today. Look around and you will see that we live in occupied territory – the world is full of pitiful people so broken down on every level – spiritually, psychologically, physically – in ways that defy all human analysis and attempts at repair. We see people without conscience living like animals for the sensation of the moment, unable to feel the suffering they inflict on others, with no room for God in their daily doing or thinking! Now ask some of these people with these destructive compulsions, these addictions and other deviances. They will tell you about the power of evil and the evil one. Listen to how we ourselves talk: "I don't know what got into me!" or "I don't know what came over me!" Change that "what" to a "who". "Who" got into me and "who" came over me. There's no middle ground in this war, there's no neutral territory. If we are not moved by the Spirit of the Living God, there is only one other option. This is why Jesus landed in our occupied territory – to take back what belongs to him. He came to this world to rescue us! **"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's works."** (1 John 3:8)

When we ask our Father in heaven to deliver us from evil, we are admitting that we do not live in some sort of closed system where neither God or Satan has any role. God is real and he works in our lives. So is Satan. It has been said, "It is only one short step from denying the reality of the demonic powers to denying the resurrection of Jesus Christ." When we pray **"Deliver us from evil,"** we are confessing that behind all the pain and bad stuff in this world there lies this dark spiritual being with whom Jesus Christ came to do battle, whom Christ came to defeat. And he has defeated the ancient enemy by his bloody cross and empty grave. Just to pray this prayer – **"Deliver us from evil"** – proclaims that there is One stronger than the evil one, someone who can deliver us – and that the evil one cannot harm us if Christ Jesus lays hold upon us with his mighty hand and delivers us.

So in this little petition we ask our Father to rescue us from the baggage and wreckage of body and soul brought upon us by the devil, the godless world, and our own sinful natures. Our Savior doesn't deny the presence of evil in your life or mine. He doesn't teach us to pray with our heads in the sand as though bad things do not really exist. Our Lord Jesus gave up his life on Good Friday, carried our sin and sadness to the cross to defeat these very evils that make our lives hard.

There are evil, bad things in this world – and all of us – some more than others – have tasted these bitter things. It is a sad thing to be in pain, to carry a heavy heart, to be crushed down by the trial and pain and loss. Even people who

want to leave most of the praying to “sentimental weaklings” or to the very old, to the very sick and the very nervous – even they know how to pray this last petition – **“Deliver us from evil.”** From foxholes on beaches, from slippery decks of ships tossed at sea, from abusive homes, from hospital rooms where doctors must bear bad tidings – this prayer has gone up – sometimes in genuine faith – sometimes in mere panic – **“Deliver us from evil.”** We need our God’s help.

How does our Father deliver us? Sometimes by simply delivering us from all kinds of bad stuff so that it never happens. To state the obvious, all of us who come here this morning are here because we have been delivered from evil, from bad things. We don’t really think about this that often. We focus on the few dark hours of our lives we have endured, but forget how much bad stuff our Father never allowed to happen to us in the first place. We are still here today because we have not succumbed to some terrible disease, because we were not hit by a car when we were five, or fell down a flight of stairs this morning. The list is infinite, there is no shortage of tragedy that could have happened to us today alone – and we are too little thankful for it. We get sick and while we moan about it, we forget all the days when we were not sick. We experience a tragedy and fail to think of all the tragedies that could have happened and never did. When you think of it, about the world we live in, it’s a wonder any of us make it to adulthood. God does deliver us from evil.

But clearly, God does not just stop it all, does he? So, what about the bad stuff that does come through the door of our life? Where is God then? Even in those times, our Father has not failed to hear our prayer. We have a God who writes straight with crooked lines. St. Paul’s famous words spell it out: **“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.”** God uses evil for good. The evil we endure is necessary to accomplish a greater good. In many ways, we cannot see on this side of the curtain just how God is delivering us from evil even when it seems everything is going wrong. For that we have to wait until the curtain parts. How horrible for us to complain about our temporary troubles now when our enduring them may be leading someone else to life eternal.

And beyond just his promise, God has not left us without examples on the pages of his book. Probably my favorite example is the story of Joseph. Sold into slavery by brothers who hated him, he is reduced to servitude in the household of Potiphar in Egypt. But he does his duty there faithfully. And just when things seem to be settling down, Potiphar’s wife falsely accuses Joseph of coming on to him, when she started it, and Joseph ends up in the dungeon. There in the dungeon, Joseph helps one of Pharaoh’s political prisoners. *Years* later, the man remembers. Joseph is summoned to help Pharaoh. And at that point, in a single day, Joseph rises from Hebrew slave to second in command over the largest empire of his day. And by his intervention the land is prepared for a devastating seven-year famine. Remember? Eventually Joseph’s entire family ends up in Egypt, and there they grow into the mighty nation of Israel as God had promised to Abraham – and then to march forth to the promised land by the hand of Moses. Who would have guessed that all things would work out this way? That God would use so many years of bitter evil to work such great joy and deliverance? Who knew? God did.

**“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.”** The supreme example? Jesus himself. This is the story of our salvation – from the cross to the crown, from Golgotha to the empty garden tomb, from the blackness of Good Friday to the brightness of Easter. If we ever doubt that good can come from the evil actions of men, of making all things work together for our eternal good, then we don’t have to look any further than the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life in heaven that we were given at the cross. Who but God could deliver in such a way and provide such a happy ending through such terrible events?

Christ’s own final word was **“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”** Here Jesus died the death we deserved to die, paid the price we could not pay, and then – then – turned death itself into the door to eternal life, breaking through the dark gates of death on Easter morning, coming forth from the grave to guarantee that we too shall rise. That is the ultimate deliverance from evil promised to us as Luther says in the explanation of this petition, “In conclusion, we pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would deliver us from every evil that threatens body and soul, property and reputation, and finally when our last hour comes, grant us a blessed end and graciously take us from this world of sorrow to himself in heaven.”

That is how it ends. Each one of us will reach the last chapter of our lives where we will have to say: “In conclusion...” But what will that conclusion be? With God’s protection on us we know what it will be. A blessed end – when he shall part the waves and lead us through, when he shall shut the mouths of the lions, when he shall calm the storm. A blessed end! When the angels come and carry us home. A blessed end! When the Father speaks a smiling, final “yes” to our last petition: **“Deliver us from evil.”**

Amen.