**“Overcome Evil with Good”**

Psalm 26

Jeremiah 15:15-21

Romans 12:9-21

Matthew 16:21-28

 Pentecost 13

“Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**1**

Last week we heard, from Scripture, “do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”. And, this week, Jesus says “if anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me”. This week we hear the details of that **transformation** and **cross bearing**, and it’s the **OVERCOMING of EVIL WITH GOOD**. For that, our first prayer is “**deliver us from evil**” and “**lead us not into temptation**”, then (and, instead) “**Thy will, God, be done on earth as it is in Heaven**” and “**Thy kingdom come**”.

Martin Luther climaxes all of our **prayer and devotional life (our service)** with the words “there is nothing for us to do on earth but **pray without ceasing against the world of Satan and his influence upon the world and our sinful flesh and desires (we start there)**. For **if God did not support us in this (the abhorring or despising of evil and clinging to good) than we would not be safe from it and him for a single hour**”.

And the “**support**” **from God for that** is **Goodness**, so our **clinging** is **to Him** knowing that it is only He who can “**overcome**” the “**strong man**” **that’s Satan prowling around this earth**. Also our weakness to resist the **temptations of this world (our sinful desires)** require the “**support**” of the **Goodness of God**. As we pray (“deliver us from evil”) we ask that God **rescue us** from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes (with the evil of **death** facing us), He would **give to us** a blessed end and **graciously** **take us** from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven”.

“Every century has been filled with its own evils inflicted upon human beings (diseases, killings, and horrible abuses)”, but the Lord (in Psalm 121) promises this: to “keep you from all evil as you cling to Him; He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore”. And from 2nd Thessalonians: “He will establish you and guard you against the evil one”.

The account of 3 men pushed bound into a fiery furnace demonstrates God’s “support” in the context of, then, graphic evil. “God, whom we serve”, these said, “**is able** to deliver us out of your hand, O King Nebuchadnezzar. But **if that is not His will in this circumstance**, then be it known that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. And, then, the fire had no power over the bodies of those men”. For the glory of God in this instance, “the hairs of their heads were not singed, their cloaks not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them; God had sent His angel and delivered **His servants**, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who **trusted in Him** … who **yielded up their bodies rather than worship anyone or anything other than God**”.

A hymn verse prays: “from evil, Lord, deliver us; the times and days are perilous. Redeem us from eternal death, and, when we yield our dying breath, console us, grant us calm release, and take our souls to You in peace”. Let’s pray for that:

 “Father in heaven, look on **our neediness** with the eyes of Your mercy and compassion. **Rescue us** from everything that would **cause** **harm and destruction to us** both physically and spiritually. **Keep us** in the true faith and finally **bring us** through the disappointments and sorrows of this life to live with You forever; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

**Temptation-even** **upon us** is evil. **As we give in to it**, it **lets evil into us**, so “lead us not into temptation”, Lord. Understand, first, that **it is not God who tempts**. “**God tempts no one**. What we pray for, though, in this petition of the Lord’s Prayer is that God would guard and keep us so that **the devil, the world, and our sinful nature might not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice**. Although we are **attacked by these things (they tempt us)**, we pray that we may finally **overcome them** and **win the victory**”.

Evil comes often from **without**, but (with **giving in to temptation**) we **allow it access deep within us**. “Many” (as our catechism instructs us) “gradually drift away from the Christian faith … drifting until that faith finally withers and dies.” Of that, the apostle Peter says in his first epistle: “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of sufferings and temptations are being experienced by your brotherhood all over the world”. And “understand that in the last days there **will come** times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to parents and authorities, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than of God” as 2nd Timothy us. “Therefore” (from 1st Corinthians) “let anyone who thinks that he **stands** take heed lest he **fall**. No temptation has overtaken you that is not **common to man**. God is faithful, and **He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability**, but **with the temptation** **He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it**”.

Luther tells us that “there is no help or comfort **except** to run to God and speak to Him from the heart like this: ‘Dear Father, You have asked me to pray. **Don’t let me fall because of temptations**”. From the hymnody: “Lead **not** into temptation, Lord. Where our grim foe and all his horde would vex our souls on every hand. Help us **resist**, help us to **stand firm in the faith**, a mighty host, through comfort of the Holy Ghost”, and we pray for that:

“Heavenly Father, **guard and keep us** from the assaults of the devil, the deception of the world, and the desires of our sinful nature. **Protect us** that we may not be deceived or misled by lies, be overcome by despair, or seduced into a way of life that leads only to death. **Shield us by Your grace** and **strengthen us by Your Word and Spirit** that **we** may withstand every attack and finally win the victory through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen”.

**2**

There are two more petitions of the Lord’s Prayer that (on the positive side) permeate the realm of evil and temptation and **OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD with their being enacted and worked upon us**. The first: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” is where God actually “breaks and hinders evil, and strengthens and keeps people firm in His Word and faith throughout this entire life and into the next”. Ezekiel records that He “no pleasure in, even, the death of the wicked, yet rather desires that they turn from their ways and live”. “This is the will of My Father”, Jesus said (John recorded), “that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should **have eternal life**, and **I will raise him up on the last day**”. “God d**esires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth**” Paul tells Timothy, and “your sanctification (or your becoming **capable of Goodness yourself**) **is the will of God**, 1st Thessalonians tells us. From the hymn: “Your gracious will on earth **be done, God**, as it is before Your throne, that patiently **we may obey throughout our lives all that You say**. Curb flesh and blood and every ill that sets itself against Your will”, and let’s pray for that:

“Merciful Father, ruler of all things in heaven and on earth, we acknowledge that Your good and gracious will is done without our prayer, but we pray that You would **make it happen in and with us**: that you defeat all that opposes Your will in the devil, the world, and **our own sinful natur**e. In Your mercy, we implore You to **strengthen and keep us firm in Your Word and faith all the days of our lives** and **bring us at last the inheritance You have prepared for us in Christ Jesus**, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.”

Finally (and of foremost necessity), “Thy kingdom come”, because that’s where **GOOD** does, in fact, **OVERCOME EVIL**. This happens “as (and only as) the heavenly Father gives His Holy Spirit so that by His grace **we can believe His promises and, so indeed, live godly lives here in time and forever in eternity**”. “Every kingdom or nation of earth is plagues with problems, yet **God has ushered in His kingdom through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ**. Since we know that Christ will return to bring an end to the devil’s only-at-the-present-time’s work of unbelief, sin, and death, we know (and Romans 12 gives us detailed instructions on this) **how we should live today**”: “The time **is fulfilled**” (Jesus said), “and the kingdom of God **is at hand**; **repent and believe in the Gospel**.” From Colossians (through the sacrifice of the cross and our baptism into it), “God the Father **has delivered us from the domain of darkness and an eternal evil** and **has transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son Jesus, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins**” … that’s **Good over evil**. From 2nd Timothy: “The Lord **will** **rescue me from every evil** and **bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom**. **To Him** **be glory forever and ever**”. From the hymn: “Your kingdom **come**, Lord, and guard Your domain and Your eternal righteous reign. The Holy Ghost **enrich our day with gifts attendant on our way**. Break Satan’s power, defeat his rage; preserve Your Church from age to age”, for which we pray:

“Father in heaven, **give us** Your Holy Spirit so that **we** **believe Your Holy Word** and **live as members of Your gracious kingdom here in time and finally, by Your mercy, be brought to live as partakers of Your everlasting reign**. All this we’ve been asking through Jesus Christ, our Lord, in +Who’s name we pray. Amen”.