

*To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God... (Revelation 2:7)*

*Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and relents from disaster* (Joel 2:13). This reading begins Lent each year. But, this idea isn't just for Lent. We pray words similar to this every day (hopefully): *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*. When we pray "Deliver us from evil," we often have in mind that God would keep such terrible, evil situations from ever affecting us in the first place. We pray that God would protect us from bodily harm, from evil thoughts, from conflict and discomfort. And he can! We believe it because Jesus believed it. Jesus prayed in the Garden that God would save him from suffering.

But, we know what happened. As Lent becomes Holy Week, we're reminded that, more often than not, God doesn't stop these situations from coming. He didn't with Jesus. Jesus was betrayed, arrested, tried, beaten, mocked, crucified, and killed. And since we are connected with Christ, our same enemies attack, namely *the rulers, authorities, the cosmic powers, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 6:12). "Deliver us from evil?" How can we continue to pray this if sin and Satan's power still afflict us?

It's the next petition which gives us the answer: "Deliver us from evil." These last petitions should be read together. Deliverance doesn't mean that God will prevent bad things from happening to us. Sometimes, God actually brings us into the heart of danger and disaster, into battle against our old Evil Foe. When we pray "Deliver us from evil," it's not that we believe God will stop bad things from happening, but that he will ultimately defeat our enemies, that he will overcome, that he will bring us through.

This is why Good Friday is called 'good' and not 'evil.' On Good Friday, we can't escape the fact that trouble and tragedy can come on God's people, even upon God's only Son. Yet, his Passion and death were for your forgiveness, life, and salvation. Surely, he didn't suffer in vain. But, what's more, God did deliver him. Even though he died and was buried, he was brought forth from the grave on the third day. And, he *will deliver us* as well. Like the thief on the cross we cry out to God, *Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom!* (Luke 23:42). In other words, "Deliver me from evil!" And, like this sinful man dying next to the sinless Son of God, we cling to his word of promise – *Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise* (Luke 23:43). If we face trouble, if we face hardship, if God has led us into battle against the Evil One, even if we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, God will deliver us, body and soul, to a life without sin, or death, or the power of the devil. How do we know? Because he's already done it in and through Christ. God raised him from the dead and gave him the power and the glory and the honor. For now, we hope, and we pray, Do not only lead us into temptation, but even more deliver us from evil. And, I say to you for certain, he will – because Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

-Pastor Squire

"Here our true Paschal Lamb we see, whom God so freely gave us; He died on the accursed tree – so strong His love – to save us. See, His blood now marks our door; faith points to it; death passes o'er, and Satan cannot harm us. Alleluia!

("Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands," *LSB* 458, v. 5)