

The Lord's Prayer: Deliver Us from Evil
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
September 1, 2013

Selections from The Theological Declaration of Barmen, *The Book of Confessions*

We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords—areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him. (8.15)

We reject the false doctrine, as though the church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions. (8.18)

We reject the false doctrine, as though the church in human arrogance could place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes, and plans. (8.27)

Matthew 6:9-13 Jerusalem Bible

⁹ So you should pray like this: “Our Father in heaven, may your name be held holy,

¹⁰ your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us.

¹³ And do not put us to the test, but save us from the evil one.”

For those of you visiting with us today, whether as a member of Southminster, or a member of the family gathered here today for the baptism, or someone who decided today was a good day to check out First Pres, permit me to bring you up to speed. This summer we've been studying The Lord's Prayer, each week a new phrase, and we're nearing the end; today we've made it to “Deliver us from evil.” Each week we use a different translation of the Lord's Prayer from Matthew 6 as our second lesson and a related, usually biblical, reading for our first lesson. Today is an exception to that.

Today we read from the Theological Declaration of Barmen, which is a confession from *The Book of Confessions*, part of our Presbyterian constitution. *The Book of Confessions* begins with the Nicene Creed and includes confessional statements from the church across centuries. *The Book of Order*, the other part of our constitution explains why the confessions chosen were included.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) states its faith and bears witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ in the creeds and confessions in *The Book of Confessions*. In these statements the church declares to its members and to the world who and what it is, what it believes, and what it resolves to do. These statements identify the church as a community of people known by its convictions as well as by its actions. They guide the church in its study and interpretation of the Scriptures; they summarize the essence of Reformed Christian tradition; they direct the church in maintaining sound doctrines; they equip the church for its work of proclamation. They serve to strengthen personal commitment and the life and witness of the community of believers.¹

¹ *The Book of Order*, F-2.01.

As explained by the preface in *The Book of Confessions*, “The Theological Declaration of Barmen was written by a group of church leaders in Germany to help Christians withstand the challenges of the Nazi party and of the so-called ‘German Christians,’ a popular movement that saw no conflict between Christianity and the ideals of Hitler’s National Socialism.”²

The Declaration was written in May of 1934, more than five years before the world began its own formal disagreement with Hitler’s policies. It did not have as its focus the actions and behaviors of Hitler but instead the compliance of churches with Hitler’s attempts to unify the churches, with the state as its head. In their own words, the authors, calling themselves a Confessional Synod, wrote: “In opposition to attempts to establish the unity of the German Evangelical Church by means of false doctrine, and by the use of force and insincere practices, the Confessional Synod insists that the unity of the Evangelical churches in Germany can come only from the Word of God in faith through the Holy Spirit.”³

Some translations of the Lord’s Prayer, including the one from the Jerusalem Bible from which we read this morning, translate *πονηροῦ* (*ponerou*) as “the evil one.” Some prefer a translation which reads simply “deliver us from evil.” Both are acceptable translations of the noun. Whether you define evil as tangible or abstract, as a gray matter in a world which is not truly black and white, as one end of a spectrum which inhabits us all, however you define evil, there can be no arguing that there wasn’t at least a touch of it working in Adolf Hitler. I don’t mean by that to say he was a bad person, although that is said. Evil, biblical evil, is closely tied with sin, which theologically I would define as turning away from God; theologically-speaking then, evil is the urge to sin, the urge to turn away from God, the urge to see others with anger and self-righteousness and disdain, not how God sees us, the urge to place ourselves above God and our plans before God’s.

Hitler’s desire to place himself above God as a self-proclaimed agent of God would then be sinful, would be not only an acceptance of evil but an embracing of evil. The authors of the Declaration of Barmen resisted that same evil in this way:

We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords—areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him. (8.15)

We reject the false doctrine, as though the church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions. (8.18)

²² *The Book of Confessions*, p.246.

³ *The Book of Confessions*, p.247.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the church in human arrogance could place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes, and plans. (8.27)⁴

William J. Carl III, the author of the *other* book which has guided us through our study, *The Lord's Prayer for Today*, addresses this human arrogance in this way. He says:

This petition, "Deliver us from evil," and the previous one, "Lead us not into temptation," offer counterbalances to our normal ways of thinking and acting by calling on God to help us in the fight against evil that seeks every day to corrupt our lives. We pray this prayer honestly and sincerely, because we know that God has made us free spirits with free will and, because of that, sometimes we slip and fall. Sometimes we make wrong choices and go the wrong way in our lives. Deliver us from the evil we participate in daily. Deliver us from the evil we promote and propagate ourselves.⁵

The thought that we promote and propagate evil, that sometimes even we embrace evil, isn't comfortable. Our discomfort comes because we know Christ, we know God. We know through Christ that we were created for good by God and, through Christ, we know that good is possible.

Created for good doesn't mean we can't get angry or shouldn't feel hurt or sad when someone is unkind to us. Anger and hurt are genuine feelings, also given by God, and part of the full expression of our humanity. Created for good means we don't use that anger to justify hateful behavior. Created for good means, when others hurt us, that we do not retaliate but, instead, we work on healing and we use our experiences to help others heal. Created for good means "I Have a Dream." Created for good are Muslims protecting Christians as they worship in places of persecution and Christians doing the same for Muslims. Created for good also means *not* scowling at the person who took "our" parking spot at the mall. So we pray, "deliver us from evil."

"Deliver" is one of those transitive verbs which must be done to us, not something we can do to, or for, ourselves. When Jesus says, "Pray then like this: Our Father, ...deliver us from evil," we are using our free will to choose to ask for God's help in amending our lives. By our free will we are turning toward God in this prayer, but our free will alone is not enough to keep us turned toward God and so we pray. Just as I said last week that the focus of "Lead us not into temptation" belongs on "Lead" and not on the variety of temptations from which we wish to be led away, so, too, does the focus here belong on "Deliver." Our prayer is to be delivered; God knows the evils which call to us, which stir us.

We're not asking that God take away the evils, or the temptations, but that God help us resist them. Those evils will always be present; we'll face them every day. Jesus also said, "Pray then like this...give us our daily bread." This prayer is meant to be prayed not just on Sunday but every day.

⁴ *The Book of Confessions*, pp. 249-250.

⁵ William J. Carl, III. *The Lord's Prayer for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press; 2006) p. 79.

When you pray “deliver us from evil” each day, your prayer becomes “God, deliver me today, deliver us today.”

God does deliver. Sometimes we receive our delivery directly. Sometimes we receive it in stories online at Upworthy.com, whose tag line is “Things that matter. Pass ‘em on.” Sometimes we receive it in the true stories in *Reader’s Digest*. Sometimes we receive it when someone else demonstrates his own turning toward God instead of away. Sometimes we receive it reading the Bible. God delivers through people who, and things which, inspire us, give us hope, give us courage, give us strength. You may have heard it said that a closed hand cannot receive. God is always trying to deliver us as part of God’s constant redemptive, loving work in this world. Today, are you open to receive or closed and unable to receive? If your answer is closed, all is not lost – that is today. Tomorrow, you try again: Our Father, deliver us from evil. And again and again. And so we pray: Deliver us, O Lord, deliver us. Amen.