

Carol's reflection – Aug 15

What are the words of The Lord's Prayer that you know?

The Gospel of Matthew in the translation of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible says:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

The King James Version of that same passage has different words and adds words that are found in some writings (more on that next week)

Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

There are other versions as well.

If we look at the words for today –
And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

Or
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil

The ecumenical version in our own Voices United says
Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil.

New Zealand Prayer Book:
In times of temptation and test, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

From the Minnesota Women's Press 'Earth Dance'
And lead us not into exploitation, But deliver us
From lording it over you,

And over each other,
And over all our other fellow creatures.

A few years ago, in 2017, Pope Francis caused a bit of a stir suggesting that we should make a change to the words that we use in daily or weekly prayer. He said that the idea that God would lead us into temptation was unthinkable.

He said, "It's not a good translation because it speaks of a God who induces temptation...I am the one who falls; it's not God pushing me into temptation to then see how I have fallen." He added that the Catholic Church in France had adapted the prayer so that it reads, 'Do not let us fall into temptation.'

But that change in English was never widely adopted.

But it gives us a good opportunity to think about 'temptation' and this part of the words that Jesus taught.

First of all, Jesus taught that prayer was a way to draw closer to God. It was a way to be open to God's presence and to God's leading. Jesus taught a way of justice and peace. Jesus taught a way of love.

This prayer is a part of those wider teachings. It is a part of a call to relate to one another with care.

If we understand it that way, then temptation is about turning away from God. I wonder if this part of the prayer is an acknowledgement from Jesus of just how difficult it is to be true to God.

Both the writers of Matthew and Luke – the two Gospels that contain The Lord's Prayer – tell the story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness. The writer of the Gospel of Mark also makes a mention of it, but it is detailed in the other two books.

After Jesus is baptised, he goes into the wilderness for 40 days. It is symbolic and connects Jesus to God's history with the people (remember that the Israelites, having escaped slavery in Egypt wandered in the desert for 40 years?).

And the temptations for Jesus are clear – turn stones into bread, throw himself from the pinnacle of the temple to be caught by angels, worship 'the devil' and have all the kingdoms of the world given to him. Jesus turns away from all these saying:

One does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.

You shall worship the Lord your God and God only shall you serve.

In order for these to be temptations to Jesus, they must be real. It must be possible for Jesus to imagine himself being fed and feeding others, demonstrating God's love with a big show, and ruling the world in a way that will make people have to believe in God. But that is not God's way. God's way is not about faith through a fist – it is not 'believe my way...' God's way is about 'All are Welcome'.

And we know that life is not easy. We know that God is with us in all things, but life has some very tough days and it feels like there is a lot of bad stuff out there. We only need to think for a moment about Residential Schools to see the tragedy of 'faith' imposed. We must remember, again and again, that God's way is a way of love and respect, and we do not have all the answers, we live in a multicultural and multifaith world.

Our own Creed begins with the acknowledgement that

We are not alone,
We live in God's world.

And it goes on to say that:

We are called to be the Church
To celebrate God's presence,
To live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.

Evil is what opposes justice. Evil is what opposes love. To be delivered from evil is to be true to justice and love – even when times are tough.

And maybe because living God's love is such a challenge, maybe because it is always possible to turn away from that way, to turn away from God, then Jesus includes those words – in whichever translation we use – to encourage us. Maybe those words are to help us to know that the temptation to easy ways are always around, that we need to pray, again and again:

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

This day and always, Amen.