

Sermon Text for September 20, 2020

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Psalm 91, Matthew 6:9-13

“Deliver us from evil”

This week has been a real breath of fresh air for many of us. We've all been working so hard and on the same page to see ourselves through this time with patience and grace and mistakes peppered throughout this experience. Remember at the start of all of this in March I had asked for patience, I had asked for grace, I had said we were going to make mistakes, but as long as we are on the same page and working together for the common cause of seeing us get through this together in the name of Jesus Christ we would end up unified together on this.

So this week was a breath of fresh air as preschool started back up again, as your session decided that we can get back to in person worship in October. The deliberateness that we have moved is a mark of Presbyterian theology. We like to do all things decently and in order. We don't speed things up for expediency sake, we take our time, knowing that in the long run those who take their time tend to follow in the will of God. You never, ever see Jesus in the Bible in a hurry, so we also have taken a long term approach and deliberately, not slowly, but deliberately have made our decisions along the way. Thank you so much for your support during this time. It is so important that all governing bodies of the church and that all of us as a family work together during this time. Thank you for doing that.

But there is life back in the church as the preschool with two new teachers have met. The food bank and our clients are coming in the building and we are expanding our ministries in that area where we are now providing fresh food, like milk and eggs, which requires a little more space and a little more hardware. With your generosity the food bank's coffers are full so we are able to do that. Things are starting to feel a little normal. We had zero issues with our preschool and the kids with their masks. Today we have two baptisms in worship, which feels very, very normal. We continue to walk a fine line between what is a new normal with masks and social distancing, and celebrating Jesus Christ as our Savior in a way that speaks to community.

Today we continue on in our normal worship as we get near the end of our Lord's prayer as we look at what is the final phrase in many manuscripts, Deliver us from evil. Today we ask God in our prayer to deliver us from evil. In a world where people try to draw lines and lift up at times evil over good in order to achieve certain results we will see that it is God's intention that we always remember what is the framework in deciding between good and evil. What is God's

command to us? To love God and to love neighbor. Anything that we do which takes us away from loving God and loving neighbor has to be defined as evil or as sin. Anything which we do which allows us to love God and our neighbor more has to be defined as good and righteous.

Let's read.

READ SCRIPTURE

Did you hear about that person in our church who every morning woke up and went out on the front porch and said out loud Praise the Lord, because she was so pleased to just be alive. Well, she just got a new neighbor who really isn't into the whole Christian thing and has repeatedly asked her to stop saying praise the Lord because it offends him. Last week she ran on some hard times and she was just praying out loud: Lord help me with my groceries because this week I just don't know how I'm going to make ends meet. Well, don't you know that neighbor, that stinker, went out and bought her groceries and put it on her front porch. When she saw them she was ecstatic and said Thank you Jesus for this miracle. This neighbor jumped out and said, see God, doesn't exist, I bought those groceries. And she looked up into the heavens and said, thank you Jesus for getting me groceries and making the devil pay for them.

Deliver us from evil in the Greek is really deliver us from the evil one, the devil, the adversary, the one who is looking to catch us as we fall, as we fail, as we put our trust in God even as things seem to be going sideways. Deliver us from that neighbor looking to catch us in false acts of faith. Our first reading from today is Psalm 91 and it is a psalm that only talks about how God absolutely, 100% does deliver us from all sorts of evil that we find in our life. If you are in a time in your life where you feel like you are being assaulted from every angle, this is a Psalm for you.

Look at vs. 3 'he will deliver you from the snare, he will deliver you from the pestilence'. This was written for 2020 as we deal with our own pestilence. Go to verse 10 and it becomes an echo of where we find ourselves in the Lord's prayer today: No evil will befall you, no scourge come near your tent. This Psalm gives us a listing of ways in which God delivers us from all that we need to be delivered because as the psalmist proclaims, God is my refuge, God is my fortress. When we approach the Lord's prayer we must approach it with the perspective that God is my refuge and my fortress and that will provide protection for all that we need in order to be delivered from evil.

Now, I am pretty sure that Christians are getting the Covid virus at the same rate as non-Christians. The 200,000 people who have died are not all heathens, these lives are precious and

the virus does not distinguish between those who are believers and those who are not. We know of pastors who opened too early and are now on ventilators along with many of their congregants. So when the Psalmist speaks about deliverance it is not in the vein that we can do whatever we want, even tempt God as we mentioned in past sermons, but rather that God is a God who protects and keeps.

We see this theme of God delivering us not only in the Old Testament, but Paul repeatedly speaks to it as well. Look at II Corinthians 1:10 and listen to his emphasis. “He who delivered or rescued us from so deadly peril will continue to rescue or deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again.” We can place our trust in our refuge and our fortress knowing that God does protect us and keep us.

This is what Jesus is telling his disciples and all of those thousands of people who are listening to him on the sermon on the mount. Let’s do a brief recap of where we are on our prayer. Remember we have looked at it and given new words in order to understand it better. Here is where we are so far, this is what the Lord’s prayer sounds like after our sermon series so far: Daddy, you are in heaven, let my life make your name holy, bring your kingdom here on earth through us, your church family. Let your will, which is always for our good, be done through us. As your will is done in heaven, so let us do it on earth. Give us today what we need for tomorrow. Forgive us our sins just as we forgive the sins of others, and please don’t make it conditional as to whether or not or if we forgive the sins of others. We are trying. Help us to not put you to the test as you always lead us in a direction that is good for our lives and always give us what we need when we are tempted by our own desires. Today, we have deliver us from evil.

The term deliver in the Greek means literally: snatch away, tear up, dig out, set free or liberate. And instead of evil as a thing it is really Snatch us away from the evil one, the devil, the great adversary, the one who is always seeking to divide us, the one who is always looking for ways in which a political issue can cause a separation even within the church. We are praying that we would not allow that to happen, but it is beyond our power to do that. God, take our selfish desires that create lines drawn and snatch us up from them and refocus us on your ministry and on your work as the most important thing that we can do.

Now, notice what Jesus is not asking us to pray. He does not tell us to pray: deliver us from suffering. Suffering is seen as a redeeming value all throughout Scripture. It is suffering which allows us to be strengthened for whatever comes in our life. It is okay to pray to be delivered from suffering, Jesus did that, but that is just not what Jesus is saying here. Instead,

here, the prayer calls for God to help us in the fight against evil that seeks every day to corrupt our lives. But the problem is that the world sees evil as good and good as evil. Violence in the name of a just cause is never good even if it creates the results that you want. Especially today as we baptize the baby of a police officer who is facing violence every day, we have to speak out against any violence within society regardless of the cause. It is not the way of God. We have people in history who have shown the way of how to transform society and not through violence, Ghandhi, MLK, but even more important, our own savior Jesus Christ who did not raise his voice, who was slaughtered on a cross after a non-violent life, and claimed all of our souls as a result. Violence is inherently evil.

But we have to trust that God will give us the wisdom to discern the good from the bad and the courage to change what needs to be changed. There are ways to change society and culture without violence. Deliver us from evil also means to deliver us from a blind eye to injustice and oppression and abuse in our society, or somehow seeks to justify it as simply a part of life that we can't do anything about. While we can't always defeat evil in our life, we can always defy it.

There are three things that I want you to keep in mind as we pray deliver us from evil. I think these Scriptural truths will accompany you well during this journey. First of all we have to know that God loves you all your days. God loves you to the point that he wants to deliver you from all evil. That is his desire. Secondly, God knows more about your situation than you will ever know. He knows all the details and all the baggage and all the stresses that you may not even be aware of as you face this time in your life. Thirdly, God sees where your life is heading. No matter how deep and down you go, God will go with you, God is there.

So as we today pray to be delivered from evil, know that we have one who does in fact deliver us. Amen.