

Deliver Us From Evil
Mark 14, 15

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O God, our Rock and Our Redeemer. Amen.

There are places we have been where we have been confronted by the face of evil. Walking through the aisles of the Holocaust museum as a teenager and seeing pictures of men, women, and children, starving, tortured and led to their deaths at the firing range or gas chambers will forever haunt my heart when I think of evil. The piles of shoes previously worn by individuals murdered by Nazis broke me. The capacity to do evil things and be consumed by evil, I think is within all of us. However, I believe in the doctrine of the *imago dei*, the image of God being instilled within each and every human being. I resist the doctrine of original sin that says we are born bad. My heart resonates with the teaching of Nelson Mandela who said, *"No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."*

Walking through war memorials, walking through battlefield sites, remembering the lives lost through war feels like evil to me. Standing outside Waller County Jail, where Sandra Bland died, after being pulled over for failing to use her turn signal, carrying signs that asked "What happened to Sandra Bland" and being harassed by the police serving that station...felt like evil to me. Hearing the tearful stories of a great-grandmother whose granddaughter was lost in a world of addiction and her own fears of not having enough money or food stamps to provide for her great grandchild who was born addicted to cocaine...felt like evil. Walking along the trail of tears, aware of the lives lost as generations of people were driven from their homes in the name of manifest destiny feels like evil. According to theologian Darby Kathleen Ray, *"Human evil always take the form of violence, against self or other; and the one hope for resisting it is to eschew its means, to choose not coercion but nonviolence, not power-as-control but power-as-compassion."*¹

When Jesus prayed in Gethsemane that God might take this cup – I believe he was praying a prayer to be delivered from evil. When Jesus got atop a never been ridden colt and entered Jerusalem, the people gathered, taking the branches from the trees to wave them and shout *"Hosanna!"* The word hosanna literally means save us. They were crying out that they might be delivered from evil, the evil in their midst, the evil of oppression by the Romans, a tax system that padded the pockets of the wealthy while the poor were barely able to feed themselves. They knew of this radical rabbi, who had broken the rules of insider/outsider. They knew he healed those the medical community had given up on. They knew he preached about an alternate empire, the Kingdom of God, where the least of these were rewarded. These same crowds, though hungry for justice, hungry for a new regime, are not immune to the forces of

¹ Ray, Darby Kathleen. *Deceiving the Devil: Atonement, Abuse, and Ransom*. Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1998. P 138.

evil. They will lift their voices in true mob mentality shouting that this one they wanted to save them would be crucified. What changes between Sunday and Friday? Power.

We have been digging deeper into the Lord's Prayer, unpacking its meaning in our lives. And this phrase, Deliver us from evil, is often connected to lead us not into temptation and deliver us from the evil one. The allusion seems reminiscent of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness by Satan. Perhaps we are praying that we would not be tempted and instead would be delivered from Satan's reach. However, Satan typically plays the role of tempter, that which clarifies who we are and what we are doing.

What are we praying when we ask God to deliver us from evil? Are we asking God to do all the work or are we willing to participate in defeating the evil forces of this world? On this Palm Sunday, we give Bibles to our children and hope that they and we remember whose side we are on. We remember the crowds shouting Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord. We are confronted with our own propensity to go along with the crowd, shouting "**Hosanna**" one minute and "**Crucify**" the next.

On the other side of Jerusalem on the very same day that Jesus was parading into town, Pilate was entering to be sure with adequate show of force that those who celebrate the Passover wouldn't get any crazy ideas and start a revolution. His parade with warrior stallions and military pomp and circumstance would have made the pitiful parade with dirty coats and tree foliage seem laughable. And yet. Deliver us from evil. God was at work.

It seems to me that as we pray that God would deliver US, not just me and mine, from evil that God is inviting us to participate in that deliverance. Jesus set a whole bunch of wheels in motion, and leaves the task of being his body of love and reconciliation with the world to us. Will we respond?

Verna J. Dozier, 20th century, said it this way: *"The important question to ask is not, 'What do you believe?' but, 'What difference does it make that you believe?' Does the world come nearer to the dream of God because of what you believe?" "Evil – its burden and its defeat – is understood not by speculating about it, but by taking up a practice of combat for good, by embracing those causes that produce love and deliverance from the crosses of this world."*² *"Our redemption from evil, then, is effected not through [Jesus]'s struggle but through our own, as we dare to bear concrete witness to the amazing grace that creates and sustains life in the face of death-dealing powers."*³

As Jesus looked upon Jerusalem, its people with such capacity for good and capacity for evil, he wept. We too, bearing the image of our Creator, are standing at a crossroads, praying Deliver Us from Evil, for that will NOT be our legacy. Instead, we choose love.

² Boff, Leonardo. *Passion of Christ*, 102, 114.

³ Ray 135.

What does the deliverance from evil look like? It looks like the isolation of college students being interrupted by a care package. It looks like a Sunday school class selling baked goods in order to help rescue animals in need of care. It looks like church folk saying my church is a place where everyone is welcome and loved, regardless of whatever hate and judgment you've experienced in the name of religion. It looks like food contributions that feed masses. It looks like marching and protesting the injustices of racism and sexism and homophobia. It looks like community in the midst of an individualistic culture. It looks like ...

In the name of the one whose love led him to his death, Amen.