

Maundy Thursday 2014
“Lead Us Not Into Temptation”
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When is the last time you were tempted to sin? I'd bet it wasn't very long ago. Whether we're kids, teens, young adults, or older adults, Christians like us are tempted constantly to sin, aren't we?

The other day I was driving down 1-A from Youngsville. I hit that section in the Wake Forest Historical District where the speed limit is 25. I was obeying the rules; and it's a good thing I was, because a gentleman suddenly backed his car out of his driveway directly in front of me. I hit the brakes hard, and came this close to hitting him. Suddenly he looked back and noticed me. He started waving his hand out the window, shouting at me, and gesturing rudely – as if I had done something wrong. In that moment, I have to say, was tempted to sin. And there have been many more times since.

We all struggle with temptations to sin, don't we? They come at us from all sides. The world entices us to sin; the devil lures us toward sin; and our own sin-filled human nature pulls and prods and persuades us to sin. God calls you and me to live lives that are obedient and holy ... and, yet, we are tempted frequently, persistently, to live lives that are anything but obedient, not even close to holy.

The Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer talks about temptation. We pray to God, as Jesus taught us to, "Lead us not into temptation." And, as Martin Luther explained this section of the prayer, it's not that God tempts us. "God tempts no one," Luther wrote. "We pray in this petition," he continues, "that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or

mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.”

I think it's safe to say that we all could pray this prayer – sincerely and earnestly pray for God to keep us away from temptations – every single time we turn on the TV, hang out with our friends, access the internet, send emails and tweets, discipline our children, go to the movies, visit our in-laws, drive through the historical district of Wake Forest where my new friend lives. We've all prayed, “Lead us not into temptation,” a million times, I know. But, if we really understand what this prayer means – that we're imploring God to guard us against these temptations to sin – we could all probably pray that prayer a million times a day.

Tonight is a good night for us to talk about temptations. Thursday night in that first Holy Week was a night filled with temptations. Peter, James, and John were tempted to sleep in the garden, instead of praying with Jesus. Christ himself was tempted to avoid the pain and anguish of crucifixion, and to go against the Father's will. The religious leaders had given into temptations to reject Christ's goodness, and to plot against him. Judas had been tempted by 30 pieces of silver to betray his Master. The other disciples were tempted to abandon Jesus, once he was arrested; and Peter was tempted to deny, three times, that he even knew Jesus. False witnesses were tempted to lie about Jesus during his trial; and the Sanhedrin (the Jewish Council) was tempted to convict an innocent man, and sentence him to death.

Truly, it was a night filled with temptations to sin ... as one person after another resisted God's plans, rejected God's authority, and focused on ungodly goals. What can we learn, from all that happened on that first Maundy Thursday, to help us when we are tempted?

We learn, first, that everyone gets tempted -- everyone! Faithful disciples and unfaithful disciples; religious officials, civic leaders, even Christ Jesus himself. Everyone gets tempted. None are exempt. Sometimes I think we get conditioned to the constant barrage of temptations to sin that we face; and we stop recognizing these temptations for what they are. Satan's goal is always to lead God's people away from God – and he's got a big, huge bag of tricks. The world and culture we live in is not aiming to bring people like us closer to God – more and more, it's doing the exact opposite, pulling us away from him. And that sinful human nature that's inside every single one of us? It's always doing battle with our spiritual nature, screaming "Me first! God last!"

Don't think for a minute because you're sitting here in church on this Maundy Thursday -- because you're singing in the choir up there, or acolyting over there, or pastoring over there – that we're any different from the disciples on that night long ago, from Judas, from the Jewish leaders, from the trial witnesses, from Jesus himself. Everyone gets tempted – so we need to be on guard. We need to pray this prayer, and to really mean it: "Lead us not into temptation."

What else can we learn, from all that took place on that first Maundy Thursday? We learn, next, that giving in is deadly. Judas sinned by betraying Christ with a kiss, and turning him over to his enemies. Well, that sin tortured Judas, and the Scriptures tell us that he ended up taking his own life in despair. The high priest, Caiaphas, along with his colleagues, conspired against Jesus and convicted him dishonestly; and their actions separated themselves from God and his grace. It's not for us to judge their eternal destinies; but giving in to temptations, as they did, could have led them to eternal death. Peter sinned by denying

Christ three times that night; and he, too, felt the sting of guilt and felt the pangs of separation from Christ's love, until he was reinstated after Easter.

Giving in to temptation is deadly – for us, too. Sin always separates us from God. Little sins, routine sins, everyday sins, sins that everybody else is doing ... they're all deadly. They all add up. They all put our souls in peril – unless they're resolved, unless they're forgiven.

And that leads us to the third, and most important, thing that we need to learn about temptations from that first Maundy Thursday. Only Christ resisted – and only *in Christ* can we do the same. Everybody on that night was tempted, and everybody suffered the deadly consequences of their sin – except for Jesus. He wrestled with the awful burden of being the sacrificial Lamb. He pleaded with God to find some other way. Jesus was greatly tempted to toss aside the cup of suffering he was being asked to drink; but, in the end, he didn't. He resisted. He yielded to the Father, and he drank deeply, fully, from that horrible cup of suffering the next day.

Jesus taught his disciples, and he teaches us, to pray about our temptations. "Lead us not into temptation" is such a critical, fundamental cry. We cannot face up to them all. We cannot resist, by our own strength and power, the daily temptations we face. We need God's help. We must have God's strength. We absolutely require his forgiveness for our failings and weak showings – and, in Christ, we have all that. Jesus, who resisted his temptations, knows what you need, and he alone can help you when you are tempted.

So pray this prayer, and know that this is God's will for you: "Lead us not into temptation!" Remember Maundy Thursday every day; and remember what we've learned. Everyone

gets tempted. Giving in is deadly. And only in Christ can we resist. Amen.