

"Deliver Us From Evil"

God in heaven, deliver us from evil. This is the final petition in our series on the Lord's Prayer and his passion and what a fitting one for this Good Friday. Martin Luther in his Small Catechism explains "deliver us from evil" this way. ***We pray this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.***

When most of us think of evil I expect, we think of things like malicious dictators, serial killers, or the devil himself. And while Satan likes those images in our minds, it's the images we don't have about evil that make him really smile. The everyday things people do and don't consider evil are the ones that I believe he takes the greatest pleasure. Things like using social media to spread rumors or to post someone's personal information in an effort to hurt them; suing someone who didn't really do anything that hurt us; intentionally undermining a person's marriage; or this one, which is our focus tonight; thinking that our sin really doesn't separate us from God. "For the wages of sin is death," wrote St. Paul. The note in my Bible on this verse from Romans says this: Those who give themselves to sin will die both physically and eternally. In other words, they will be separated from God forever. Unsettling words aren't they especially on this dark night.

Death is the surest sign of evil's presence because God did not create us to die. He created us to live but as ancestors of Adam and Eve, who first rebelled against God's law and messed things up big time, we today carry on what they started. Every single one of us here in this church

tonight; every single one of us in this world for that matter continue what they started and that is rebellion against God. Left on our own, that rebellion will eventually separate us from him forever.

And the blame? It rests on us. How uncomfortable is that? We can read all about it in the Bible. In fact, after the fall, the wages of sin hit home hard as recorded in the book of Genesis with the account of Cain murdering his own brother. And that blame continues throughout the entire Bible. The most revered King of Israel, David, was an adulterer and a murderer. Peter, the great disciple, who when asked by Jesus who do you say that I am, replied, "You are the Christ, the living Son of God." He denied knowing him at all after Jesus was arrested. Judas, Thomas, Ananias and Sapphira- take your pick- the list goes on and on.

But the blame rests on you and me too doesn't it because we have all turned from God. What if your most disgraceful sins were written down for everyone to read? What if the details of your lies or your deception were recorded for all to see? What if the details of you or me intentionally rebelling against God even in the smallest way were uncovered and out there in public view? The truth is just like so many of those in the Bible, our sins have caused a lot of damage haven't they? Our sins have torn nations apart, communities apart; our sins have torn families apart; our bodies apart; and most importantly for you and me tonight on this Good Friday, our sins have torn man's relationship with God apart.

Maybe you're asking yourself, how can this be? Isn't God's desire that all people be saved? The answer to that question is yes. His desire is that all people be saved but we cannot deliver ourselves. We cannot work our way into God's grace. We cannot choose whatever path we want and then walk our way into His grace. We can't pray our way in or meditate our way in. We can't worship our way in or buy our way in. We simply can't do

anything to deliver ourselves into a saving relationship with him. And that realization stares at us tonight through the suffering eyes of our sinless Savior as he was crucified.

The nails pounded through the palms of his hands; the huge spike driven through his feet holding him to the cross where he would hang in agony and pain- more agony and pain than anyone who has ever died will ever experience. Because his death was for every single sin that every single person had ever and will ever commit. Every sin was pounded into our Lord that day on Golgotha with force none of us can imagine. Every sin was taken by our innocent Christ that day on the cross. That is the only way we could be delivered from eternal separation from him.

And while we might think we understand what he went through delivering us from separation, we can't. We might have those times in our lives when we might even echo Jesus' words from the cross, "God, why have you forsaken me?" feeling that somehow God has checked out of our lives because we are suffering so much. But that is absolutely not true in any sense. Even on our worst days, in our worst experiences, we live in the presence of God because of one man. One man who sacrificed himself, suffered and cried out as he was bearing the sins of all people; as he was enduring the punishment of God's wrath.

Make no mistake, we live in the presence of God because someone else paid the price owed to him. Someone else went through all of the pain, the agony, the humiliation, and finally the separation.

It's truly amazing when you think about it. God's work through the death of himself in the flesh was his way of atoning for our sins. It was his way of healing the broken relationship.

That's why this is Good Friday. It's not sad Friday or bad Friday or the Friday of making us feel guilty but Good Friday. The price for our sins was paid for this day and on this day, we were delivered from the evil of death. And as unbelievable as this still might seem to us and our rational minds, this is the way God chose to save. We rejoice that the eternal separation from God has been removed from our lives forever but we rejoice with repentant hearts don't we? We rejoice as repentant sinners who recognize our hardened hearts and call out to God. And while I certainly hope those of us here tonight get it- that is in order for the death of Jesus Christ to have any meaning at all, we must confess our sins, there are so many in our world- even in our own communities and in our own families who still don't get it. There are many who think this death on the cross stuff means absolutely nothing.

There are those who say it is all a blatant lie. There are those who say that even if the crucifixion happened that it means nothing since it was just another dead guy who claimed a false identity. There are even those who say that there is no excuse in the 21st century to put one's faith in the primitive Biblical God who could have never pulled off what we are remembering tonight. And there are those who say they believe in God but not in the God who demands perfection; not in the God who sees people as sinners who deserve what Jesus received on the cross.

But this is the way God chose to end the eternal separation from him. This is the way he chose for you, for me, for the worst person you can think of in your mind and even for those who deny Him and hate Him. The cross was his way and it is the only way any of us would have any chance at anything other than separation from him.

So tonight, in faith, we come to foot of that cross and it's not empty. It's not empty like the one hanging so prominently here in our church or

empty like the ones you might be wearing around your necks or hanging on the walls of your homes. Tonight, there is a body on it.

And thank God he allowed it to happen. Thank God for his love for us- a love that is so great that he had compassion on us and didn't give us what we all deserve but delivered us from evil by taking our place.

Until we return again, may we all contemplate just what this means in our lives of faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In His Holy Name.

AMEN.