

**Summerland United Church**  
**Nov 24 The Prayer of Jesus: Deliver Us**

**Threshold**

As we come to the end of our series on the Prayer of Jesus we reflect, today, on the line, “and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” This line draws on an ancient Judeo liturgical tradition from the Psalms of Lament requesting ‘deliverance’ from god, by god. Just as his ancient Hebrew ancestors did before him, Jesus calls on God to come, to stand with, and to offer strength in time of trouble.

In scripture, this is where the prayer ends. It was later and with Christian Tradition that the Doxology, a short hymn of praise to God, lines were added and we now end the prayer with “For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever amen.” This is a message of the assurance of God’s presence in our lives.

**Scripture: Psalm 121**

*Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, myth metaphor or story, listen for the meaning it holds for you on this day.*

<sup>1</sup> I lift up my eyes to the mountains—  
 where does my help come from?

<sup>2</sup> My help comes from God,  
 the Maker of heaven and earth.

<sup>3</sup> God will not let your foot slip—  
 The Holy One who watches over you will not slumber;

<sup>4</sup> indeed, The One who watches over Israel  
 will neither slumber nor sleep.

<sup>5</sup> God watches over you—  
 God is your shade at your right hand;

<sup>6</sup> the sun will not harm you by day,  
 nor the moon by night.

<sup>7</sup> God will keep you from all harm—  
 he will watch over your life;

<sup>8</sup> God will watch over your coming and going  
 both now and forevermore.

Reader: May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

**Reflection:** I once had a conversation with a person who really disliked the Prayer of Jesus because of this line. For her when she heard, *lead us not into temptation*, she understood it to mean, God leads us to temptation as a test of our will. Which, when it was pointed out to me, I did understand. I

never heard it that way though. For me, I really don't need to lead by anyone or anything to temptation, I can get there on my own quite easily thank you very much.

In the Aramaic translation which we've talked about on other Sundays, the line is translated to, *Don't let surface things delude us, But free us from what holds us back.*

In the Womanist Version we'll read later on the line is interpreted as, *Separate us from the temptation of empire, and deliver us into community.*

And in the Big Book of Jesus, the line is, *God, help us in everything we do. Please help us to live for you all through each day.*

When we read different translations, paraphrases and interpretations of the Prayer as a whole, and this line in particular we begin to see the nuances in meaning and perhaps gain clarity in areas we are unsure about.

With these different versions available to us we can see that the intention of this line is not a test from God, rather it's a cry, a lament to God saying – I need your help. I need your support. Surface things delude me – I get caught up in all manner of temptations because they are so in my face – right there on the surface.

This empire we live in – of instant gratification, constant bombardment of media, constant reminders that we are not good enough and this product, this concept, this app will make you your best self – so long as you subscribe, consume and post about it – is the empire that tempts us away from the simplicity of the Kingdom of God. Which is, you are enough, you don't need to do more, be more, download more, consume more, post more for God to love you. You are beloved without all of those things. All those things are distractions and make us forget we are beloved and do not deliver us into community – where we share, show respect and honour each person as the beloved human being that they are.

If we ask for God's help in all that we do, then those temptations of Empire and Surface things are weakened. Maybe not completely gone and we're still going to make choices to play games on our phones instead of praying – which is completely ok. Honestly.

As most of you know I had a week of study leave last week. I went to the Sorrento Retreat Center on Shuswap lake for a few days to attend a contemplative prayer retreat. It was a wonderful time of quiet and rest. I didn't take my laptop or my ipad. I did have my phone, for driving directions and communication if needed. But mostly my plan was to stay off anything digital and embrace the quiet and stillness of not being plugged in all the time.

A number of people at the retreat commented on wanting this weekend to be a 'reset' or 'reboot' of their spiritual practices. Like me, they'd fallen out of practice, and they wanted to immerse themselves into prayer once again with the hopes that it would reinvigorate their every day practices.

I resonated with this, as I've fallen out of the practice too. It's been so long since I had any regularity in my practices I didn't even know how or where to begin again. Going on this retreat gave me the opportunity to relearn how and where to begin again.

Reflecting on this with a friend after I got back, my friend commented – I KNOW meditation and prayer is good for me, I KNOW I always feel better when I do it, but I just resist actually doing it.

I expect we all recognize this feeling where its for meditation, going to the gym, eating a salad, going to bed at a reasonable hour – all the things we know make us feel better, but sometimes really resist doing.

So this line of the prayer – lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil – is a call to God to help us make healthy choices, and a reminder that we can do that and if our strength or perseverance fails us, we can call on God for help. From where does my help come? The writer of the psalm cries out to the mountains. My help comes from God, maker of Heaven and Earth. I am watched over both day and night by God who loves me, not to watch me stumble, but to keep my foot from slipping.

We're coming to the end of this series where we've consider the Prayer of Jesus through the lens of relationship. We've seen how the lines of this prayer invite us into relationship with God, we make petitions to God, while agreeing to do our part. This line is no different. God can't make you go to the gym, or eat that carrot, or put down your phone. These are things we need to do on our own, yet we can lean on the support and love of God to do so, when it's hard and when we're feeling stubborn.

For my part, I know that what helps me to remember this support from God is when I practice, regularly, prayer. But as I've said, I got out of the practice, the retreat helped me reset my practice and inspired me to create the opportunity for anyone who wants to reset or create a prayer practice for themselves. During the weeks of Advent, starting Dec 3<sup>rd</sup> I will host Lectio Divina and Centering prayer sessions. This will be approx. 1 hour long sessions where we will engage in 2 forms of Christian Prayer. Lectio Divina is divine listening, where we listen to a piece of scripture and listen for what God is saying to us through the passage. Centering Prayer is a practice of silence, where we connect to Gods presence in the center of our being, the indwelling place of God within.

Our Advent theme this year is called The Inn, housing the holy. We'll consider the Innkeeper of the nativity story, who despite everything found room for the Christ Child to be born. We've been on a long journey these last few months and years and it is time for us to rest, to take a room at the inn and just be present. Advent and Christmas can be very chaotic sometimes, so Sunday's here and the Centering prayer sessions will be places of rest and calm. We will sing and we will pray and we will make room in our hearts for the Christ Child to be born. We will consider all the ways we already House the Holy – here at Summerland United, and perhaps look to the Christmas star to light up what else we can make room for here in this new place.

### **Prayer of Jesus**

The Womanist Lords Prayer, *by Rev. Yolanda Norton*

Our Mother, who is in heaven and within us,  
 we call upon your names. Your wisdom come.  
 Your will be done, in all the spaces in which you dwell.  
 Give us each day sustenance and perseverance.  
 Remind us of our limits as we give grace to the limits of others.  
 Separate us from the temptation of empire, and deliver us into community.

For you are the dwelling place within us, the empowerment around us,  
and the celebration among us, now and forever.

Amen.