

As we look at the prayer Jesus taught his followers we may wonder about the phrase, “*Lead us not into temptation.*” Does God tempt us? I was reminded in one of the readings that this prayer comes not long after Jesus had been alone in the wilderness for forty (40) days where he was tempted by Satan. For some, this is an affirmation by Jesus that he knows what it is like to face our temptations. Jesus’ words to Peter in Luke 22:32 after the Passover meal, “*But, I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail.*” Jesus was aware of the struggles Peter and the others will face in the coming hours—the temptations that come our way. His prayer is that they will not lose the faith they have found. He knows the struggles of daily living.

So, when we pray, we are to pray, “*Lead us not into temptation*” or, as The Message says, “*Keep us safe from ourselves.*”

James in 1:13-15 writes that God cannot be tempted nor does God tempt. James and the other disciples struggled with issues of faith. What does it mean to lead a life as Christ lived? God does not tempt but temptations do come. Paul in I Cor. 10:13 writes to the Corinthian congregation that we have the strength to overcome as we will not be tempted more than we can bear and that God will provide a way out. It is not if we will be tempted but how do we respond when we are tempted.

The decision will always be ours. We call it “free-will.” A current example of this is whether one should stand or not stand during the playing of the National Anthem. Because of the First Amendment of the US Constitution the choice is ours. Now, we may not like the choice some may make, but as soon as we limit it in one area we are in danger of having it limited in others. Freedoms we may want to keep could also be taken away. It is hard to watch others do things that disturb us. Our blood pressure boils. But it is the freedom on choice and we must honor that.

Have you wondered how God feels when we exercise our freewill? When we exercise the freedom God has given us to accept or to reject God. God does not want anyone to reject the path offered in Christ. However, God accepts the decisions we make. You or I cannot make a faith decision for another person — as much as we may want them to make a decision for Christ, for faith - the decision is theirs and God accepts it. We may need to learn a lesson here and accept it too.

Temptations come. We cannot say they don’t. I thought of I John 1:9-10 where John writes that none of us can say that we have not sinned. When we say that we have not sinned we have become a liar. We are sinners, there is no getting around it. We have not been perfect. We have fallen short of the expectations placed on us. All have sinned - saints were once sinners. We could replace sin with temptation—we are all tempted. This prayer, this phrase reminds us of our need for strength beyond our own in those moments. We need strength for the bad days. Those days when temptations come our way. We need strength at those times when we have lost sight of the light. When we have lost the vision or the goal that is before us. Struggles and temptations come - the decision is ours - that is our freedom.

Today, we lit the Advent candle of Peace. Peace is a struggle. This may be the hardest candle we light. Hope, Joy and Love are a little easier. But Peace, we seldom want to turn the other cheek. We forget to pray for our enemies and those who would persecute us. We often derail peacemakers. We want and often seek retribution. There seems to be so much foolishness involved in the peace process. I recall an episode of MASH (I think) where the news reported

that progress was being made at the peace talks. They had finally decided on the height of the flag poles in the compound. We clench our fists! We hear the screams of impatience.

Yet, do we ever stop and think of how hard it must be for God. How hard it was for God during those hours Jesus hung on the cross. How hard was it to hear those words, “*My God, my God why have you forsaken me? (Mark 16:34)*”. How hard was it to look away at that moment which forever changed human history? Why? Because God’s love was greater than we can understand.

The Good News is that God did look away. God did turn the other cheek - God chose peace. John continues in I John 2:1, “*But if anyone does sin, we have one who speaks to God in our defense, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.*” This is probably not what we would do - but this is what God did. In those dark moments, love won. Peace won.

We are told that after his denial Peter wept bitterly. Had he not a few hours earlier said, “*I am ready to go with you to prison and to death*” (Luke 22:32). Peter saw no reason for Jesus to pray for him he knew he would have strength to resist. Imagine those moments on the beach - they have eaten from a miraculous catch and Jesus takes Peter aside and asks, “*Do you love me?*” (John 21:15). I imagine there were more tears in Peter’s eyes — he is still loved. Temptation failure - Love redeems.

In a version of the Lord’s Prayer, “Human Rite” by Ward and Wild:

In times of temptation,
strengthen us.
From times of trials,
spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil,
free us.

Amen.

NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1988