

Matthew 6:7-13
“The Prayer that Delivers”
The Rev. Dr. Jean Halligan Vandergrift
Roslindale Congregational Church, UCC, Roslindale, MA
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Today’s scripture reading concerning the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples is taken from the Good News Translation of the Bible. Let us listen for the Word of God.

⁷ “When you pray, do not use a lot of meaningless words, as the pagans do, who think that their gods will hear them because their prayers are long. ⁸ Do not be like them. Your Father already knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ This, then, is how you should pray:

‘Our Father in heaven:

May your holy name be honored;

¹⁰ *may your Kingdom come;*

may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ *Give us today the food we need.*

¹² *Forgive us the wrongs we have done,*

as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us.

¹³ *Do not bring us to hard testing,*

but keep us safe from the Evil One.’

Deliver? It’s an interesting word. We understand what this word means when we hear that our package from Amazon has been delivered! It’s meaning is clear to us when we hear that a mother delivered her baby. Most of us have also heard the word used for a minister delivering a sermon. But “deliver us from evil?” **What are we asking God to do when we pray verse 13 of the Lord’s Prayer?**

The word in Greek is *rhysai* (rye a say). It can be translated into English as “deliver,” “rescue,” “save,” or “free.” It literally means to bring back, to draw one in close again when that one has been pulled away from or has drifted apart from the deliverer.

I think that you and I certainly know what it is to be at a distance from ourselves and from the one who loves us. I’m sure that we have been tempted to be dishonest with another and to do something we have resolved not to do. Temptations of all different kinds daily pull us away from our true identity, leaving us confused and weak.

Trying times can have this effect on us too. The pandemic, ongoing injustice, and poverty, all of these wear us down and take us away from who God intends us to be. As a white person in this society, for example, I’ve been trying to listen more deeply to people of color, and I hear them describe the relentless, harmful impact of racism, their never-ending fight to right wrongs, and the frustration of having to teach those of us who are oblivious about the damage racism does to *all* people. They say, “It’s exhausting!”

Pervasive evil also rips human beings away from their core beliefs and values. The Department of Veteran Affairs, for instance, now recognizes more of the damaging effects of war upon soldiers. You've heard of PTSD, but there is also "moral injury," which refers to a wound to an individual's moral conscience.¹ It can arise from killing, or not giving aid, or betraying someone, resulting in profound emotional guilt or shame.

So you and I know what it is to be away from good and in need of deliverance!

Jesus knows too. In the wilderness, at Gethsemane, and through the crucifixion, our Savior experienced this same turmoil. On the cross, when Jesus uttered the first verse of Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" he was praying and invoking the *rest* of the psalm, including its last verse about being able to proclaim God's deliverance.

Jesus doesn't want us to experience the agony of evil, so he instructs us to pray as he did – to ask God to deliver us, to pull us back close, to reclaim our allegiance, and to free us. Jesus tells us "pray like this. Make my prayer your own. Edit verse 13 to your particular trouble." For example: "Deliver me from the temptation to overwork, over eat, and over control. Deliver your people from pain, disease, stress, anxiety, and depression. Deliver us from the 'isms' that dehumanize, from greedy, power-hungry leaders, and from oppression of all kinds. Deliver me to yourself, God, and for yourself." ***This is what we're asking God to do when we pray verse 13.***

Maybe you recall the scene in the *Lord of the Rings* when Frodo freely offers Galadriel, the Queen of the Elves, the infamous ring of Modor? She is seriously tempted to accept it, to gain even more power and power to do good, but ultimately, she passes the test and refuses the ring. I don't know if she explicitly prayed to God, but she was *delivered* from the corruption of evil, and returned to her right mind and true identity.

I know a congregation that is located in a dangerous neighborhood. It sought to serve the community, but also to protect itself from it – a difficult dilemma! So it erected a high fence around its property, while it also distributed food to the needy; the result was a mixed message. Under new leadership, these congregants started to pray "Deliver us from evil." They gave up their own sense of superiority to those around them and worked on their fear, which freed this congregation to develop more open, genuine relationships with their neighbors.

When you and I pray our customized version of Jesus' prayer, we also will experience deliverance. Deliverance may *not* mean that the temptation goes away entirely, but it loses power over you; not that the trial disappears, but that you are not alone; not that evil is destroyed, but that you are strong, close to the One who loves you.

Speaking of being close, the story of David Brown comes to mind. He is an inspiration: a three time gold medalist, the first totally blind athlete to run 100 meters in under 11 seconds. God has not restored his sight, but has given him a guide in Jerome Avery, who runs alongside him. The two are tethered with a string tied between their

¹Sonya B. Norman, PhD and Shira Maguen, PhD, "Moral Injury," https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/cooccurring/moral_injury.asp

fingers, and Brown ‘sees’ by using all his other senses! Avery says, “The faster we run, the closer we get.”²

“Draw us nearer, nearer, nearer, Blessed Lord!” Amen.

²As heard in the show “One Team: The Power of Sports,” NBC.