

## **Pentecost 7C, Proper 11. July 28, 2019. The Lord's Prayer.**

I've been thinking about this "time of trial," that we pray God will help us avoid. This translation of Luke is a little different from the traditional translation from Matthew that we usually pray here: "lead us not into temptation." Either translation works and the one we read today is generally preferred by contemporary translators. And it resonates deeply with me. It feels broader than just "temptation," which these days so easily falls into moralistic, private connotations. When we hear "temptation" we think of unwatched money or too closely watched body parts. The time of trial, though, is maybe easier to recognize as something like a midterm exam, a time when we find out what we're really made of in a deeper way than just whether or not we give in and order dessert.

Most of us have grown out of the old fashioned chivalric impulse to pursue tests of character, like some kind of Don Quixote heading out in hopes of adventures that will locate his limits. Even though I think we know that a life that doesn't eventually ask us what we're made of isn't a life at all. But we pray that God will save us from the time of trial, and if we find ourselves in it, that God will deliver us from evil. We pray to avoid it, but we know that it will come. Regardless of how faithful or successful or righteous or careful we are, the time of trial comes and as often as not, there's no way to predict its coming. The phone rings and we hear the diagnosis. Our spouse finally tells us what's been wrong, and it's devastating. The fight breaks out on the other side of the train car and we're the most able-bodied person there to protect a fragile passenger. The boss presents his brilliant illegal plan to solve all the company's problems and asks us to keep it quiet. A stranger out of the blue asks from a place of deep need whether we will do something rather extraordinary to help them. Or we find ourselves with a choice to make about how deeply the needs of others will impact us.

Messing up, sinning, being less than the people God calls us to be can bring us to the time of trial. But it's not the only road that leads there. Jesus faced several times of trial: from the temptation in the desert to the night before his crucifixion, and about a thousand times in between when he was challenged with foes, befuddled friends, or just people in need. Regardless of how hard we pray, it comes, and the question is who we will be when we find ourselves there, because by the time we know where we are, it's usually too late to prepare.

There's a lot that I don't know. I don't know whether our next time of trial will be a split second decision or a situation that we need to endure for months. I don't know whether it will be something we can avoid or something that is forced upon us; or whether it will be a positive opportunity for virtue or a precipice with vice on either side. Most of all, I don't know why our prayer that we might avoid these times isn't answered more often. But I've been in some times of trial and I've walked with some of you through times of trial and I've mostly paid attention in both situations. So I have some things that I think are faithful and true to say.

First, it matters that this petition is in the context of prayer. I realize that it might be predictable to the point of boredom to hear your priest encourage you to pray. But if our goal is to be equal to the most trying situations we find ourselves in, then there is nothing more

important for us to do than pray. I learned this from Bishop Joseph of the Episcopal Diocese of Renk in South Sudan. We're privileged to have a partner parish in Renk Town, and St. Luke's faces extraordinary challenges to serve God in their impoverished and war-torn community. And every single time that Bishop Joseph comes here and we ask him what they most need he says, "Your prayers. Above all else we need prayer." Our prayers may not result in miraculous changes to the world, but they change us. They make us the people who do not have to fear the time of trial, because we are not alone and we can face them as the best version of ourselves.

Of course when I say that we're not alone I'm first talking about God, but I also mean the more prosaic sense that the Lord's Prayer is in the first person plural. The Lord's Prayer assumes that we are a part of a community of faith or maybe even a church. Being a part of the church does two things for us or to us in the time of trial. First, when we really give ourselves to God together and give ourselves to each other here, we are training for those crisis moments when we have no time to prepare and need to be something like the best version of ourselves. This is why I don't think there are ever any low stakes weeks in our common life. There are times to rest, but not times to coast—because we are always here growing closer to God and loving each other into better versions of ourselves. And the work of loving God and each other is always urgent.

And second, if we let it, the church can love us through the time of trial. Some of the most beautiful moments in my ministry have been watching this church walk beloved parishioners through fatal diagnoses and all the way up to death. We are able, regularly, to take difficult and practical stands against evils in our world and community because we can face them together, strengthening each other's faith and lightening each other's labor. And right now, my family is experiencing the powerful, humbling love of this community as we commit to parenting a child who, at least at first, will ask quite a lot of us. We were able to say yes to a difficult call to parent, a call into a blessed time of trial, because we knew that you would love us through it.

This is the kind of community and the kind of life into which we are baptizing Nolan Spalliero at wiggle worship this morning. A community of prayer. A community that together breaks the bread that we are given. A community that faces the times of moral and physical trial together. We will ask him to join us in these times when they come for us and will promise him that we won't let him go through them alone when they come for him. In a moment when we join him in renewing our baptismal covenant, we will make certain promises to God, to each other, and to him. We'll do our best to be true to these promises that summarize our life together. And we'll help each other remember, in the times of trial, the promises that God has made to us. However trying the time, God is trustworthy. Amen.