

Lord's Prayer 5  
23 June 13

### "Lord's Prayer 5: Evil?"

Deliver us from evil. Is there such a thing as evil? Some say no. Some neuroscientists, who seem these days to be emerging as the new high priests of the psyche, believe that all human behavior is biologically determined. Therefore, there is no such thing as free will or personal responsibility. It would be sort of comforting if we could prove that what made Hitler Hitler was a malfunction in his human nature, a glitch in his circuitry, because it would allow us to exempt "normal" human nature (ours for instance) from having Hitler potential.

Maybe someday that'll be proven right. But for now, I ain't buyin' it. Partly because I believe in God and in good and evil. Partly because proof for this theory is just not there. And partly because it just doesn't feel right; it doesn't match, it doesn't fit with what I see. Even noted atheists like Christopher Hitchens could not speak of people like Osama bin Laden without using the word "evil." I just don't know how to explain what happened in WWII Germany without believing that some force of evil was loosed among otherwise good, decent people, many of whom,, not incidentally, were at least nominally Lutheran.

So in this Lord's Prayer we ask God to deliver us from evil. I think that means more than "protect us from all the evil things out there." Although it does mean that. Whether you believe in a force of evil or not, there is no question that even in the modern world, we are surrounded by dangers. Simply living is risky business. There are evil people. There are temporarily out of their mind people. There are selfish people, careless people. There are diseases and accidents, and who knows what else. Living is risky. We know that; we live with it.

But I think "Deliver us from evil," means more than "protect us from all the evil things out there." I think it also means—maybe mainly means—"Deliver us from doing evil." T. S. Eliot put it this way, "One reason why the lot of the secular reformer is easier than that of the Christian reformer is this: that for the most part the secularist conceives of the evils of the world as something external to himself. There is nothing to alter but the machinery: or if there is evil incarnate, it is always incarnate in other people. So far as a man sees the need for converting himself as well as the world, he is approximating to the religious point of view." I encourage you, when you pray the Lord's Prayer to think that you are both praying to be delivered from evil forces outside of you and also to be converted so that evil does not take root in you.

This sounds easy. Few of us are tempted to become mass murderers or terrorists. When evil is thought of that way, praying to be converted so that evil does not take root in us sounds easy. But I don't think it is. First of all, we live in such an inter-connected world that it about impossible to not participate in systems that do evil things, that exploit workers, that extract natural resources from countries while leaving behind no benefit for the common people, or that lead to hunger and malnutrition. I think when we pray, "Deliver us from evil," we are calling ourselves to account before the throne of God for the evil things in which we are entangled. And to me, that means trying to do something about them. My ways of fighting evil include Bread for the World,

Amnesty International, and the ELCA World Hunger.

I encourage you to let “Deliver us from evil,” motivate you to find your own ways to fight the world’s evils. When we pray, “Deliver us from evil,” we are asking God to be so converted that evil does not take root in us.

Another quote, this one from Simone Weil: “If someone does me an injury I must insure this injury does not degrade me; and I must do so out of love for him who inflicts it, so that he may not really have done evil.” Wow. I’ll repeat that. “If someone does me an injury I must insure this injury does not degrade me; and I must do so out of love for him who inflicts it, so that he may not really have done evil.” Deliver us from evil indeed.

I haven’t said anything about from where evil comes—I don’t know. And I haven’t said anything about why, if God is good, there is such a thing as evil. A lot of ink has been spilled on that one, and I’m pretty sure there just isn’t any completely satisfying intelligent, answer. Rather than deal in these kinds of speculations, I’m much more interested in praying for deliverance from evil from evil without and from evil within.

I do, however, know what God does with evil—and so do you. You know the story of the cross. You know how Pilate was caught up in the web of injustices that held the Roman Empire together so that he judged that he, the governor, was powerless and washed his hands of the whole Jesus affair. You know the stories, you know the justifications offered, and you know that a power of evil was at work through otherwise good, decent people, *none* of whom, this time, were Lutheran.

And you know what God did with this evil. You know that with God, death leads to resurrection, so that the power and sting of death is destroyed through the death of Jesus, and the power of evil is overcome through this evil act of crucifixion.

I don’t take this to mean that what we do doesn’t matter because will somehow fix it all in the end. I take it to mean that as a child of God I am called to join in God’s mission of bringing good out of evil and life out of death. I take it to mean that when I do this work I can do so in great hope, even when the odds are bad. Because even though we live in the in between time, the time between when God’s will is fully revealed and fully done, even so, God is at work doing all kinds of little things (and a few big things) that can only be described as miracles.

So when I pray, “Deliver us from evil,” I’m praying for protection; I’m praying that evil may not take root in me; and I’m praying to be delivered from evil into God’s good Kingdom.