

Ps 3:1,2
Hy 1
Ps 44:1,2,3
Hy 3:4,5
Ps 142:4,5; Hy 63:7
Luke 6:20-26
Luke 8:4-15
Lord's Day 52.127

Yarrow, April 3, 2011

Beloved Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Life confronts us daily with the need to make choices, thousands of them, day after day. Nothing comes by chance, all things come instead from God's fatherly hand – and that's true too of the choices we need to make each day anew. What shall I wear? What shall I eat? What job shall I tackle today? What tool shall I use? What shall I do in my free time? Which show shall I watch? Shall I help with the dishes? The Lord our God created us to be responsible and so to make decisions, good decisions. In the course of each day the Lord puts challenges before us, moments to make decisions, and it's His will that we make decisions that glorify Him.

But what happens? We experience those opportunities to make decisions as temptations. Pressure arises from who-knows-where to make a decision that suits ourselves – but does not glorify our God and Maker. And of course, if a decision does not glorify Him, that decision is sin. Time and again we make decisions based on *our* preferences instead of based on *His* commands. The point: we're obviously inclined to evil... Temptation is too much for us...

But our Lord, brothers and sisters, has taught us to pray the sixth petition, one we're to pray in the face of every decision we may make. "Lead me, Father, not into temptation – for I'm too weak to withstand Satan's attacks...."

What's this petition really all about, congregation? What does praying this petition look like in the midst of life's myriad questions??

I summarise the sermon with this theme:

THE VICTORIOUS CHRIST INSTRUCTS HIS PEOPLE TO SEEK GOD'S PROTECTION FROM SATAN'S ATTACKS.

1. The Setting of this Petition
2. The Answer to this Petition

1. The Setting of this Petition

The disciples followed their Rabbi for a number of months as He taught the people of Galilee and Judea about the Kingdom of God. In the process, the disciples learned so very much – also in relation to the material covered in the sixth petition about temptation. Consider.

Luke 6 records for us the sermon Jesus preached to the crowds on the plain. According to vs 20, Jesus was looking at His *disciples* when He delivered this speech. In other words: it was the disciples first of all who were to take its instruction to heart.

We're familiar with Jesus' words. Listen: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man" (vss 20-22). Jesus mentions a list of circumstances each of us prefers to avoid, things like being poor, being hungry, being hated, being insulted. Jesus doesn't mention poverty and hunger and being insulted as a general, theoretical threat, but looks the disciples in the eyes and says it in relation to them; *they* may end up poor and hungry and hated and insulted. Yet they're not to be dismayed when that happens; Jesus calls them "blessed" when that happens, and even adds the explanation of vs 23: "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven." We try to put ourselves in Peter's and Andrew's and Thaddeus' sandals, and we're not so convinced that being poor and hungry and insulted and hated is reason for joy.... Especially not when Jesus adds that the compensation may not come till years down the track – for He speaks about a great reward in heaven, and we understand no one gets that reward until the day of death or the day of Christ's return (whichever comes first). Meanwhile, you have to put up with the abuse and the hunger.... Not nice.... Point? We feel we couldn't blame the disciples if they gave in to the *temptation to distance themselves from the Son of Man a bit* in order to avoid being hated and insulted on His account

The same needs to be said in relation to Jesus' further words in the same sermon. Vs 24: "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you..." (vss 24-26). Again, Jesus mentions a row of circumstances here, this time situations we actually appreciate. Being rich, being well fed, being happy, being popular with the crowd: that appeals to us. Again, the words are directed to the disciples; it's *they* who may be rich and well fed and popular. We can see it in the eyes of our minds: Peter and Judas and Bartholomew all dressed in striking outfits, a well-fed look around their middle, respected individuals as they walk the streets... – and we're thinking: we like that. But listen to Jesus; He tells Peter and Judas and Bartholomew and the rest: *Woe* to you when you're well fed, *woe* to you when people speak well of you. There's no reward for you in heaven, for you have your reward now.... In other words: the disciples are *not to pursue* wealth and abundance and being with the in crowd! Yet in as much as they're as human as we are, pursuing that wealth and abundance and popularity is a distinct *temptation*. We can just hear Satan whispering in their ear: hey, you gotta make the most of life now. Who wants ridicule *now*, especially if you're not going to get anything back for it until after you've been an old man?!

The challenge that Jesus' sermon placed before the disciples received more colour in the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:4-15). The Parable itself is well known: a farmer of Jesus' day (and the disciples saw lots of them) sowed his seed by hand, with as result that the seed fell into four types of seedbed. Some seed fell on hard ground (the path), some seed fell on rocky ground (where the soil is thin), some on ground invested with weeds, and some on good soil. And of course, different things happened to the seed depending on where it fell.

The seed, of course, is the Word of God, and Jesus Himself is the farmer who sows the seed. He broadcasts this seed throughout Galilee and Judea, including in the hearts of the 12 disciples. Now the question is: what sort of soil is there in John's heart, and in Matthew's, and in Judas'? Hard as a path, so that the birds eat up the seed? Thin as soil on rocks so that it sprouts but withers in the dry heat? Cluttered as soil invested with weeds? Or fertile ground??

In relation to the sixth petition, it's the seed that fell on rocky soil that needs attention. For in His explanation of the parable Jesus said this: "Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away" (8:13). "The time of testing," says Jesus, and here He uses the same word that's translated in the sixth petition as "temptation". Testing: God puts all sorts of tests, challenges on the paths of His people. Our inclination for riches, popularity, comfort means that we're inclined to make decisions that avoid poverty, hunger or persecution – even if in the process the Lord is not glorified. Peter in time to come would have to make decisions, and Andrew too, and Matthew and Judas and James as well. When God puts challenges before them, would their decisions avoid hunger and insults in favour of wealth and popularity? We realise: *that's a real temptation!* So: would their decisions demonstrate trust in the Lord their God, or would they give evidence that these disciples' hearts were in fact rocky soil that had no depth, where faith withered as soon as the going got tough? Could they handle temptation or not?? We realise: the question is not valid only for the twelve disciples!

Walk along then, congregation, with the twelve as God put challenges on their paths. Look at what happens some short days after Jesus spoke about that testing in the Parable of the Sower. Luke 9:1: "Jesus called the Twelve together" and "gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and He sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick." Result? Vs 6: "so they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere." Put yourself in their shoes, with a similar mandate for the people of Yarrow, Vedder, Sardis, Chilliwack, Abbotsford, Vancouver, and similar results. The sick of town are healed, so that families rush loved ones from Chilliwack hospital to you for more healing. The addicts of town are delivered from their bondage to alcohol and drugs, blind people throw away their white cane... You're *in*, the hero of Fraser Valley East! Do you think it'd get to your head? How would you apply Jesus' words from that sermon of Luke 6: "woe to you when all men speak well of you"? (vs 26). You see: here was for the disciples the *test* mentioned in that Parable of the Sower! How would they handle that? Or would they prove to be seed that flourishes for the short term, but once the sun of temptation shines on them their soil dries up and the seed of faith withers?? Could they *handle* temptation??

The question is so critical exactly because *testing* is what Jesus promised them! Luke 9:22: says Jesus, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and He must be killed..." Peter, John, Matthew, Judas: *that's what going to happen to your leader* – the one in whose name you preach the kingdom of God and cast out demons and heal the sick, *the stuff that makes you popular!* Then Jesus adds, vs 23, "If any would come after Me" –and that's what the disciples had been doing– "he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" Shocking words – and we hear the connection with Jesus' declaration of blessing and woe in Luke 6: Blessed are you who are poor and hungry and insulted and abused..., but woe to you who are rich, well fed, happy, popular.... Peter? John? Andrew? You OK with the notion that down the track you'll be abused, poor, hungry, will lose your popularity with the crowds, will lose your laughter and your ample girth? You'll need to make a decision, brothers: will you choose, in the challenges God places before you, to go the way of the Lord or the way of the flesh? Will you, in the hundreds of decisions you need to make everyday in following Christ Jesus, trust God and obey, or will you follow your own head in trying to protect your popularity? What'll it be, men??

Their answer? *Your* answer, brothers?? Sisters?? *Theirs* is recorded in Luke 9:46. Jesus had repeated two verses earlier the same material He'd told them a week before, that prophecy about "the Son of Man" being "betrayed into the hands of men" to be crucified and killed – and that prophecy, of course, reminded them that anyone who would follow the Lord must be willing to deny himself. So what do they decide to do?? Listen to vs 46: "An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest." Imagine: when Jesus speaks of suffering and betrayal and rejection, on the disciples' mind is the question of who gets the best positions in the kingdom of heaven, who'd be the richest, the most well-fed, the most popular – *that's* what's on their minds! They fertile soil? Bear much fruit?? Not them!! In fact, look at Luke 9:53: the people of Samaria didn't welcome Jesus, and James and John respond by suggesting to the Lord that they "call fire down from heaven to destroy" those Samaritans! Make decisions that please the Lord? Resist those temptations of the flesh that want material padding and popularity?? The disciples didn't have it! And: how well we understand.... In the words of the Catechism: "we are so weak that we cannot stand even for a moment...."

Add to that, congregation, what happens next in the lives of these disciples. For Luke 10 records that Jesus sends out 72 others to join the twelve in preaching and teaching. These 72 come back with the ecstatic report of Luke 10:17: "Lord, even the demons submit to us in Your name." And you can imagine, brothers and sisters, how this success can get to their heads! Jesus reply? Vs 18: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Satan, the great Opponent, the Adversary of God and His people: he's seen the advances of the kingdom of heaven on earth, and so rushed to the battle field to try to turn the tide against Jesus Christ. It means for the Twelve that they now have a most formidable enemy in their backyard! If James and Thaddeus and Judas can't stand tall in the challenges God in wisdom sets before them but sink through their knees and give in to temptation, how shall they ever stand tall when *Satan has come to earth* to master mind the battle against Christ and His kingdom?? Surely, surely, they haven't a chance.... Again, we understand so well.... Back to the Catechism: the devil eagerly uses our own flesh to attack us remorselessly....

That, brothers and sisters, is the setting of the sixth petition. Luke 11:1: the disciples who'd listened to Jesus' instruction over the months –including His instruction about poverty and riches, about being insulted or being popular, including too His instruction about being tested under the withering sun of opposition– ask the Lord how to pray. His answer? The last of the petitions He lays on their lips revolves around precisely this point; "Father," they must say, "lead us not into temptation" (Luke 11:4b).

And the disciples, we may be sure (though Scripture doesn't say so) followed through on Jesus' instruction to pray this petition. How, then, did the Father answer their plea? That our second point:

2. The Answer to this Petition

Just before His arrest and crucifixion, the Lord Jesus Christ revealed to His disciples a demand Satan made to God. Luke 22:31: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat." The point: Satan wants to prove that Peter is chaff, wants to prove that this disciple does not have what it takes to be a disciple of the Lord; under a bit of pressure he'll sink, he'll sin. Jesus reassures Peter that He has prayed for him, "that your faith may not fail" (vs 32), but He adds that Peter most certainly *will* fall to Satan's temptations.

That, we know, is what happened. After Jesus' arrest Peter followed to see what would happen (Luke 22:54). In the space of an hour three people connected Peter with Jesus, and each time Peter denied it. Why?? Luke 6: he didn't want to be insulted and rejected on account of Jesus' name and so face hunger and poverty and possible death; he wanted instead to be popular and rich and comfortable.... Or in the words of Luke 9: he didn't want to follow the Lord to the cross, didn't want to

deny himself. And that's to say that when the sun of opposition beat upon him he withered like a plant in dry soil. Handle temptation? This was Satan's hour, and *Peter was chaff!* Worthy to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? Worthy to preach the kingdom of God?? Worthy to sit with the Lord in the kingdom of God? No, no, no!! What this means in terms of God's answer to the sixth petition? And we say: surely it means that the disciples pray in vain.... It's how we feel too; though we beseech God not to lead us into temptation we find ourselves succumbing time and again to Satan's attacks..., and doing what's wrong before the Lord.... It bothers us deeply that we're so weak....

But hear, then, congregation, the gospel of Jesus Christ! Recall from previous sermons: the Father is under no obligation to answer our petitions in the way we prefer Him to answer them! The disciples earnestly pray this petition –“Father, lead us not into temptation” – and in direct reply to their petitions the Father *sends the Son to the cross*. On His way to the cross the Son of God had choices to make, decisions to obey God or disobey Him. His life was a test, each day a temptation: did He want to be rich and have the approval of men, or was He OK with poverty and insults – and the approval of God? He had to answer the question each day anew as the circumstances of each day differed from those of yesterday and another decision had to be made: would He entrust Himself to the Father's leading, or would He follow His own head? Day by day, writes the apostle to the Hebrews, Jesus “learned obedience from what He suffered” (5:8), and that's to say that He was willing to give up the good things of this life in order to do what the Father required. That included any refusal to change His message when the chief priests and teachers of the law put pressure on Him. Even when He was arrested and interrogated about His being the Son of God He did not sugar coat His answers or retract any of His teaching – though the outcome was sure to be crucifixion. Once He was nailed to the cross the insults kept coming, but He did not sink through His knees, yes, Satan and his demons did all in their power to prompt Jesus to sin. *But He resisted* temptation to follow His own head. One little word from Jesus in favour of the devil, one word from the Son of God to the legions of heavenly angels and He would have been delivered from the cross and His tormentors destroyed, the poverty replaced by wealth, the insults replaced by adoration from every demon in hell.... Yet even when the Father rejected Him, even when the Father *handed Him over to every temptation hell could think up*, Jesus did not give in to temptation, did not sin. Instead, He accepted on His own shoulders the full load of God's judgment against our sins – tough and lonely though obedience was. And in the process He defeated the devil. As Paul put it: on the cross He “disarmed the powers and authorities” (Colossians 2:15) – and that's a reference to the devil and his demons. The blessed result is, congregation, that God crowned Jesus Christ to be Lord of lords, and that's to say that the devil too is subject to Jesus Christ. So Satan cannot tempt a single disciple of the Lord anymore –not you and me either!– without the express consent of the Saviour. And that is why in turn Paul can reassure the Corinthians with these words: “God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide the way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Rich words those are! So what do you think, congregation? The Christians of Corinth were no stronger than the disciples, and the temptations of their city were countless; Corinth was the San Francisco of long ago, a city of sexual perversion. What were they to do in the face of Corinth's ample temptations?? Like the disciples, they were first of all to pray, pray that sixth petition! And as they prayed they were to keep in mind the gospel of their Saviour's triumph, how He on the cross had defeated Satan so that this evil tempter cannot tempt without the Lord's permission. More, they were to recall that the God who sent His Son to pay for their sins loved His own so much that He would not let

them be tempted beyond what they could bear” – not because they were strong in themselves, but because the Father would provide the way out.

That, brothers and sisters, is very much the promise for you too. We need to make choices every day, and it's very much in us to follow our preferences for comfort, satisfaction, having the things of this life. *But it's not about us; it's about the glory of our God.* So we pray that God keep us from temptation, that He give us strength to make God-pleasing decisions – and we're confident that our faithful Saviour will supply our needs, each day anew.