

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost
October 16, 2016

Text: 2 Timothy 4:6-8; 16-18

Theme: “Deliver Us From Evil”

Deliver—delivery can seem to be pretty easy. With my one click purchase I do that very thing and usually in a couple of days that purchase is at my door. If I want to see how it is all going all I have to do is track my order and I can review the progress being made to make that delivery. It’s easy from my end, maybe not so easy for those doing the delivering. There could be obstacles, challenges for making that delivery at the right place and the right time.

The deliverance of our text is of another sort. “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed...” This is deliverance or rescue from every evil deed. We pray for this in the Lord’s Prayer, “deliver us from evil,” even the evil one. This deliverance is more difficult, obstacles are too great for us to overcome and conquer. But there is one, the One, who has.

This is an inspiring deliverance. Paul’s look to this final deliverance is inspired. But as we look at our text maybe for the moment Timothy is not so inspired. It can be difficult to be inspired when evil is crouching nearby.

Paul writes, “The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed.” (vs 18) These were evil days for Timothy as his mentor had been arrested and it looked like he would not be released. It was a time of apprehension for Timothy as he would have to face many challenges alone. The rebuke and correction of false and haughty teachers would be harder without the authority of the apostle behind him. But it was not just a matter of harder for him. It was a matter of the truth being taught. If no truth, then no deliverance.

As we take a look at our OT lesson we see that the early days depicted there were trying days. Sin is quickly doing its damage. Despite the pain and danger brought on by sin Eve conceives and gives birth. She calls her son, Cain (“Acquired”). She says, “I have gotten a many with the help of the Lord.” (Genesis 4:1) She recognizes the Lord’s deliverance in her delivering this child. Then she will conceive and bear again. This time the name is Abel.

Two healthy sons, but not a healthy time. There is trouble. Cain sees God is pleased with Abel’s offering, but not his. It’s a heart issue, his. Cain is seething. God gives him a warning about the danger of sin. He tells Cain that sin is crouching at his door, wants to have its way with him, but he must conquer it. Deliverance from evil is needed. But there is no indication that Cain seeks it. He doesn’t conquer sin, no, it conquers him. Sin delivers more death.

Deliver us from evil. Evil is always crouching at our door. It’s true whether we are young or old or somewhere in between. So you are young, just getting started in life, but you are not as far along on the course as you would like to be. It’s not your dream job, and that dream person is still, well, a dream. It could be there is plenty of debt. Yes, sin is there crouching, urging you to meet your urge, whatever that may be, in the way that is ‘right’ for you whether it is right or not. Or you are not so young. You don’t see as well as you used to, but your hindsight is quite sharp. It could be because by this time there is plenty behind to take a long look at. It might be so much that you find it a little depressing. You’ve lost a step or two. Actually you are out of step with the culture. Your morality is being stepped on, kicked around. That’s the way it is now. What will it be like for children, grandchildren and beyond?

Yes, sin is hanging around crouching. Temptation is there trying to lead you into false belief, despair, or other great shame and vice. Like Paul in Romans 7 and 1 Timothy 1 we are given insight, the mirror of God's law, to see our unsightliness. Who will deliver me from this wretchedness? All this weighs on us, threatens to crush the breath right out of us. It can seem hard. We sigh in fatigue.

Paul's situation was probably weighing heavily on Timothy. Any hope may have been crushed out of him as he read this letter from Paul, particularly the words that are not included in our text. I read those verses (2 Timothy 4:9-15), "Do your best to come to me soon.¹⁰ For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia,¹ Titus to Dalmatia.¹¹ Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.¹² Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.¹³ When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.¹⁴ Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.¹⁵ Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message." It must have been hard to hear these words from Paul.

Life can weigh heavily upon us. We worry evil will have its way. In the latest issue of *The Lutheran Witness*, (October 2016), we read of Luther writing to his friend and colleague, Philip Melancton, as they both face an uncertain future. There we read Luther's words, "I pray for you earnestly, and I am deeply pained that you keep sucking up cares like a leech and thus rendering my prayers useless. Christ knows whether it comes from stupidity or the Spirit..." (p. 13 of this issue).

We sigh as we remember life in this world does have an expiration date. It looked like Paul's was about up. "I'm already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come." (vs 6) Yes, our days do come to an end in this life. It may

come suddenly or little by little, but rest assured, it comes. Well that doesn't sound very restful or assuring, but surely it comes.

All this may droop our shoulders a little, talk of expiring far from inspiring. But there is inspiring even in the face of the expiring. Paul knew it. "But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed that all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth." (vs 17) We are not sure what rescue Paul is referring to. It could be he means his first trial did not result in his death. We are not at a loss to know that the Gentiles did hear the Gospel fully proclaimed by Paul. From Antioch, to Crete, Asia Minor, Greece, Rome and we believe beyond, the message of Christ was sounded loudly and clearly.

Paul had written when he had been imprisoned the first time, "to live is Christ, to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21) His life was all for Christ, His servant to preach the Gospel, how he did preach. Now he was about to experience the gain part. His death would be his gain. He faced it confidently.

Paul was inspired to serve, to be faithful unto death, the One who had served Him. That One tells a story in our Gospel lesson today (Luke 18:9-17) about two men who go up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee recounts his greatness before God. He doesn't ask for any forgiveness. Why should he, doesn't mention any sin crouching at his door. It was way beyond crouching, had made its leap long ago.

Yes, he went up to the temple full of himself. Jesus was also full. In this One all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in bodily form. Yet He came not in glory or might, but in service. His miracles and teachings were certainly something to see and hear, but they were

not done to exalt Himself, no, done in service to meet the needs of the body and for the cure of the soul.

Jesus was faithful to the mission before Him. Sin was always crouching, but He always conquered it. He came to conquer its power once and for all. The Lion of Judah came as the Lamb of God. The tax collector in Luke 17 said, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (vs 13) God has been merciful to us sinners. Jesus was faithful unto death as He gave Himself as the offering in our place. He would say, “Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit (Luke 23;46).”

Paul is about to breathe his last, but his words are not the words of a defeated man, no words of victory. “I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to be, but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (vs 8)

Sin is always crouching at the door. We pray for deliverance from evil. The same evil one who was causing trouble for Cain, is the roaring lion still seeking someone to devour. Jesus delivers us from the mouth of this lion. Next week we will sing “A Mighty Fortress is Our God,” as we celebrate Reformation. Among the lyrics are, “This world’s prince may still scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He’s judged; the deed is one; One little word can fell him.” (*Lutheran Service Book*, Hymn 656, stanza 3) I have been told that word is “liar.” He is the father of lies. His accusations can’t stick for our Lord Jesus took them all for us. All sin has been atoned for.

There is deliverance from the lion. There is deliverance from death. Our Lord’s words promising life are not empty because His tomb is. He lives! He reigns! He returns! This is news to inspire! We have been delivered.

We have been delivered from the futile life of slavery to sin. We still live in this broken world in broken bodies, but we are new creations in Jesus. There is life for us to live here, right now, fullness of life walking in the pathways of our Lord. And there is the deliverance to life above with our Lord. We read in the explanation to The Lord's Prayer in the Small Catechism: **But deliver us from evil.**

What does this mean? “We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, **and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.**” *His promise!*

Yes we are inspired to run the race of service to our Lord right now, to keep the faith. We won't be winded. We hear Luther's words to Melanchthon when Melanchthon was sucking up worry, “but I for my part am not very much troubled about our cause. Indeed I am more hopeful than I expected to be. God, who is able to raise the dead, is also able to uphold His cause when it is falling, or to raise it up again when it has fallen, or to move it forward when it is standing. If we are not worthy instruments to accomplish His purpose, He will find others. If we are not strengthened by His promises, where in all the world are the people to whom these promises apply?” (LW, October 2016, p. 13)

Deliver from evil. We have been delivered. “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.” (Colossians 1:13) We will be delivered yet to our Father in heaven there to await the final trumpet call of victory.

Meanwhile, for now, brothers and sister in Christ, inhale, suck in the promises so we can go forth as those to deliver the good news of deliverance from evil to ever more. For Jesus' sake. Amen

