

**Lenten Service
April 10, 2019**

**“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil”
by Pastor Gary Garvey
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Grace to you and peace from our God our Father and our Lord and our Savior Jesus who is the Christ.
Amen? Amen.

In our Lenten pursuits on the Lord’s Prayer tonight, we are addressing the portion which states, “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” It is a very good thing to be delivered from such. Yet it calls for an almighty fortress to mentor and guide us along life’s journey. Also, the virtue of humility to perform self-examination when things are going well and when things are going not so well. In the early 16th century, a German monk and university professor by the name of Martin Luther taught the Psalms. He liked the 31st Psalm. The stories of God and the almighty fortress and King David, and verse by verse he would teach these things at the University of Wittenberg. In his teachings he came upon the statement in Psalm 31:1, and the passage confused him greatly. How could God’s righteousness deliver him? The righteousness of God, his great justice, how could it deliver him? Could it only condemn him to hell as a righteous punishment for his sins? One night in a tower in the monastery, Luther thought about this passage of the Psalms. He struggled with it; he wrestled with it. And then he slipped over to the New Testament, and he read Romans 1:17, and the fog began to clear. For in it the Gospel, the righteousness of God, is revealed. Luther said he thought this day and this night until he finally understood that the righteousness of God, the almighty fortress, revealed by the Gospel and what it is. It is not speaking of the holy righteousness of God that condemns the guilty sinner but of the God kind of righteousness that is given to the sinner who puts their trust in Jesus Christ. Luther said of this personal experience, this revelation of faith, this faith formation in his life, that “I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith. And therefore, I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through the open doors of paradise. The passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven.” Martin Luther was born again, and the Reformation began in his heart. Another great Lutheran scholar would say, “This was the happiest day in Luther’s life.”

In our Psalm 31 this evening, it reflects the point of King David through his life of trials, his victories, and certainly his poor judgement. What an occupation! David was a shepherd, he was a warrior, and he was the king of Israel. David hails from Bethlehem, the city of David in Jerusalem. David’s life example teaches us that honest, self-examination is necessary to recognize our own sin and then we must repent of it. We may try to fool ourselves or others, but we cannot hide our own sin from God. David killed Goliath. He was the champion of the Philistines when he was only a youth and Goliath a giant and a veteran warrior, too. David was victorious because he trusted not in himself but in God, his almighty fortress, for the victory. And although he was a war fighter, repelling the enemies of Israel, he refused to kill King Saul. Despite several opportunities, he flat out refused. Saul was God’s first anointed king. He pursued David out of mad jealousy for years. He just pursued him; he wanted to take him down because he was so jealous. But David would not raise a hand against him. He would not.

David and Saul's son Jonathan became fast friends, more like brothers, setting a model of friendship and love that everyone can learn from. As a model of faithfulness, King David is included in the hall of fame over in Hebrew's 11. David was an ancestor of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who was often called the son of David. Perhaps David's greatest accomplishment was to be called a man after God's own heart by God himself. King David was a man of many contrasts, at times single-mindedly devoted to God and at other times, he felt a temptation, committing some of the most serious sins. He lived a frustrating life, first in the shadows of his brothers and then constantly on the run from the vengeful King Saul. And even after he became the king of Israel, David was engaged in almost constant warfare to defend the kingdom of Israel. King David was a great military conqueror, but he could not conquer himself. He allowed one night of lust with Bathsheba, and it had disastrous consequences in his life. Although King David fathered Solomon, one of Israel's great kings, he was also the father of Absalom, whose rebellion brought bloodshed and grief. His life was a roller coaster of emotional highs and lows, and he left us an example of passionate love of God and dozens of Psalms, some of the most touching and memorable, beautiful poetry ever written. Martin Luther liked the Psalms and taught them at Wittenberg. David was courageous and strong, always trusting in God for protection. He remained loyal to the king, King Saul, despite Saul's crazed pursuit of him throughout his entire life, David loved God deeply and passionately. And even though God always offers forgiveness, we cannot escape the consequences of our wrongdoing. David's life proves this, but God highly values our faith in Him. Despite life's ups and downs, the Lord is ever present to give us comfort and hope, and it's a beautiful thing.

I know some of you have read Bishop Hutterer's, Deborah Hutterer's letter from this synod, and she tells the story of Mitch, who at a very low point in his life was consumed with drugs and craziness; couldn't hold a job; couldn't sleep at night; he was involved in crime; he had reached the point that his wife was ready to give up hope; and his parents prayed for him. The cycle of recovery had relapse in it, and he struggled to make it and to put it together. He prayed, and he prayed. And I think about that when I think of the good people of American Lutheran Church, people like Mitch, human beings, folks of flesh and blood, who have great times, and then they have these times in the valleys, too. They go to hospitals and they go to places, and they struggle with sicknesses and they watch people they love and who are close to them struggle with difficulties, too. They're not happy with the political situation, and they're not happy with one thing or another, and they have these times when they're down and they have to have something they can cling to and they have to have someone they can go to and God calls them to come to be with them by their side. And so we pray the Lord's Prayer, and we say, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Deliver us, Lord. Deliver us. Take us to a new place, and we pray, and we ask for leadership and guidance, and we ask for help. The Beach Boys, back in the 60s, sang, "In My Room," and they sang, "There's a world where I can go and tell my secrets to and it's in my room. It's in my room, in this world, I lock out all my worries and my fears, and it's in my room. Do my dreaming and my scheming, lie awake and pray. Do my crying and my sighing and laugh at yesterday. And now it's dark, and I'm alone, but I won't be afraid because I'm with the one I love, and I'm in my room today." When we struggle with those difficult places in life, it's the almighty rock, the almighty fortress to whom we go. In those down and out moments, God comes to us like a brother, like no other. In our limitations, this mighty fortress is with us through grace and mercy, and we are justified by grace through faith. Amen? And Amen.

And now may the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and our minds on Christ Jesus. Amen.