
Resisting Evil and Changing the World for Good

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by Dean Sam Candler**

Last Sunday, we baptized lots of babies at the Cathedral of St. Philip. I say “we” because it is always a community who baptizes a person into Christ. It is not simply a priest who makes the baptism happen, and it is not simply a family either. It is a community, standing up— with and behind the child—supporting that person in their life in Christ. When anyone is baptized at the Cathedral, that person becomes a member not just of the greater Christian Church, but a particular member of a particular parish: the Cathedral of St. Philip.

Often, when we baptize children, there is lots of noise during the service. There is crying, of course, and stray comments and questions. Furthermore, there are inevitable newcomers in church who don’t know our customs and habits. With all this, the liturgy can seem uneven and disconnected. It may not be the best time to concentrate on particular prayers, or on pressing theological issues.

Still, on Sunday, important questions were asked of all of us, and we would do well to pause and consider this one: The celebrant asked, “Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?” As with the other questions, the people responded, “I will, with God’s help.” (The Book of Common Prayer, p. 304)

The problem of Evil in the world produces questions that are difficult for any religion. Where does Evil come from? Why is there is Evil? What is Evil? How can an all-powerful and all-good God allow Evil? You know those questions. If you are at all spiritual (or religious!), you have asked those questions.

Christianity actually acknowledges Evil more directly than some other religions. We do not try to explain it away, as just an illusion maybe. Even if we cannot adequately explain where it comes from, we treat Evil as a definite reality. So it is that we mention Evil in our baptismal services. One might think that a happy and delightful baptism ought not talk about bad or uncomfortable things! And certainly not Evil! But baptism, especially baptism into a community, is exactly what empowers us to resist evil.

On some days, it might appear to us that there is more Evil than Good in the world. There are places around our world right now where that might seem especially true. And, on any given day, there is someone experiencing more Evil than Good. More particularly, however, on any given day, each of us has the capacity to choose the Good or to choose the Bad.

Will there be more Good today, or more Evil? That will depend upon us. I believe that it is our power of choice that determines the prevalence of Good or Evil in the world. On any given day, we have the capacity—inside ourselves—to make the day more good or more bad. Sometimes that choice is a very small one, a tiny distinction maybe, and yet one that can change an entire day or month or year.

So it is that the Baptismal Covenant question reminds us that the resistance of Evil requires perseverance. It requires a perseverance that is daily. That is why the Lord’s Prayer, which we can say several times a day, ends with the dramatic plea: “Deliver us from evil.”

There are days when we succumb. There are moments when we make the wrong decision, the bad one. There are days when we participate in making the world more bad than good. Those are the moments that require repentance; and, again, repentance is a daily habit of Christians.

Someone once said that our question to God, “Why is there evil in the world?” might well be one that God can ask of us. God asks the same thing to us, “Why is there evil in the world?” with the implication that we ourselves are the ones empowered to change the world for the Good.

Changing the world for the Good, however, will not happen without the help of others. We need a community. We need the wider Christian Church, those who stand with us at baptisms, in the midst of confusion and tears, and who say “we support this person in her life in Christ.” Yes, our community baptized lots of babies into the Church on Sunday. I hope, in doing so, that we changed the world for the Good!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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