

Pentecost 18  
September 18, 2016

Text: I Timothy 2:1-8

Theme: Pray for Good Government

1. That we may live Christian Lives
2. That many may know God's truth

Hang in there – there's only about 50 days to go until the General Election. Then, barring a whisker thin margin a la 2000 Bush v. Gore, we'll know who will serve as our next president. Maybe at this point, you're exhausted with constant Facebook posts highlighting one candidate's positives or their negatives. Maybe you're tired by the fact that organizations doing political campaigning and polling are exempt from the National Do Not Call List. Maybe you were ready to vote for Gary Johnson and are having second thoughts after he couldn't even identify with what's happening in and around Aleppo, Syria. Maybe you thought of Jill Stein until she was arrested for vandalism at a pipeline protest. So you're frustrated. Maybe scared. Saddened. Here we're encouraged to pray.

But what exactly should we pray for in this matter? Paul says, **I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—<sup>2</sup> for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.** Pray for everyone. We look around at the world today and we see so many that fit the definition of haggard and **lost, like sheep without a shepherd** (*Matthew 9:36*). Maybe that includes some of you, your family, your friends. But it also includes many nameless, faceless folks with whom you might never consider associating under normal circumstances. Pray for them and as you do, Paul says, pray **for kings and all those in authority.** What a striking statement when you consider the kinds of persecution Paul was enduring and the church as a whole was undergoing at the hands of ruthless Emperor Nero. Paul says pray for them too. Not that they be cut down, as we find in some of the imprecatory Psalms. Not that they be conservative Christians as we might surmise in listening to the discourse today. Nope, Paul simply wants to be able to **live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.**

Ponder that for a moment, our prayer for the government, isn't that they be in complete agreement with us doctrinally or that they write only those laws that espouse conservative, confessional, Christian values and promote and foster the spread of Christianity. Of course, those things might be positive from our perspective, but they wouldn't really change the hearts of sinful man. What Paul really is concerned with is that the government preserve and foster an environment in which Christians can do what they have been called by God to do and that is to live godly and holy lives without interference. And we see here just how timeless the truths of God's Word are. Paul could just as easily have been our contemporary as Timothy's in writing these words. When Massachusetts can pass a law that makes Christian pastors fear of breaking the law. When we see how nefarious political correctness has become and how culture is willing to try to suppress one set of religious values and beliefs more than all the others. And when Christians of many sorts seem to want the government to do their bidding, we do well to take Paul's words to heart and pray simply that we may live Christian lives.

There's a delicate balance that must be struck here as we recognize we live in two distinct kingdoms, the kingdom of God, a spiritual kingdom governed by his grace, and the earthly kingdom, if you will of the United States, governed by laws meant to protect the earthly safety and security of people of all creeds and religious persuasions. It is not in the government's responsibility to make people believe in Jesus, and I don't think we want them to try. Neither is it the church's responsibility to make people believe in Jesus. That's the Holy Spirit's work and he works through God's Word as proclaimed by us. Thus, above all we need this freedom to proclaim God's holy, inspired truth, unadulterated by political correctness and unencumbered by laws prohibiting the free expression of our faith.

And why this is so important is driven home by the next statement of Paul. **This is good and pleases God our Savior who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.** Think about that. God didn't send his Son into the world because he wanted only Jews to be saved. He didn't send his Son to die only for the sins of Americans. He doesn't love only the old or the young, black or white, rich or poor, Republicans or Democrats. He wants all people of every ethnic, social, cultural and political class to be saved from sin and its wretched consequences. School teachers and terrorists. Those who stand for the national anthem and those who don't. He wants them all to come to this

certain knowledge. Not a wishy-washy, believe whatever you want, live however you want, we're all heading to the same place any way kind of thing. No. He wants them to know the truth. He wants them to believe the words that were given to us as the truth. He wants them to know the one who is the manifestation of the truth. He wants them to know Jesus, Savior sent to redeem all people and rescue from certain death and hell.

You know the truth and rejoice that he has redeemed you from sin and certain, eternal death. Therefore, you can pray for those in authority to preserve and protect the religious freedoms we have and need. Pray for those who will join you at the polling place this fall, that whatever else might divide us, we stand united on this, that the freedom we have to worship as God wants and to live the lives he has called us to live is among the greatest blessings we have in this country. May we never take it lightly for in it, God enables us to work and labor on his behalf in peace, free from fear.

As we live those peaceful and quiet lives of godliness and holiness, we are his calling card to the world around us. The Savior he sent, he makes known to the world through those who already know him, worship him and serve him. And to this point, we have that ability. We can live to proclaim Jesus. We can find ways to share him with all people because they are all objects of God's mercy in Jesus and his earnest desire to know him in faith. That love he has is our love also for all people even in a country as evenly divided politically. We do well to look beyond the politics and all the other bases on which people make judgments, form groups and action committees and simply look proclaim the one thing that matters at all – Christ Jesus and him crucified. Finding a way to break down barriers without confounding the truth can be difficult and time consuming, but it is critically necessary.

The opportunity to make our voice heard is one of the great blessings of our democratic republic. Doing so with a vision to what is really important sometimes get clouded by a news media that chooses sides based on purely earthly standards and positions. You and I have a higher vision. And our prayers must rise to our Heavenly Father, regardless of who wins and how much or little we agree with their positions, that above all we continue to be blessed with the ability to worship freely and to share boldly his message of love and redemption in an ever increasingly pagan and godless world. It is the only eternal answer. All else, our beloved country included, is only temporary.