

September 22, 2013
Pentecost 18

"The Privilege of Praying for Two Kingdoms"

1 TIMOTHY 2:1-8

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- ²for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all men-- the testimony given in its proper time. ⁷And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle-- I am telling the truth, I am not lying-- and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles. ⁸I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

I am a citizen of two kingdoms. Because I was born at St. Mary's Hospital in Watertown, Wisconsin on August 29, 1947, I am a citizen of the United States of America. I am also a citizen of the Kingdom of God. That blessing came to me when I was baptized shortly after I was born in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In a very real sense I have dual citizenship. I have citizenship in a kingdom on this earth and citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. The kingdoms on this earth will perish. The kingdom of heaven will last forever.

Martin Luther called these two kingdoms the right hand of God and the left hand of God. The left hand of God is the earthly government that God establishes to protect us and watch over us. We are thankful for the police officers that patrol our streets to keep them safe, the firemen that protect us when our house starts on fire, and even the much maligned politicians whom we have elected to run our country.

The right of God is his Holy Christian Church that is made of people who build their lives on Christ and his all atoning sacrifice for their sin. This kingdom grows when God's Word comes into the lives of people and brings them to saving faith in Jesus. In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "Thy kingdom come!" We want the Lord to expand his kingdom throughout the world before the end comes. We also pray for governments that are not hostile to the Word of God and to the citizens of God's kingdom.

We pray for the kingdoms of this earth

"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for everyone- for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful lives in all godliness and holiness." I am sure that you have people you pray for regularly. You cannot fall asleep at night or drive down the freeway without remembering them in your prayers. The Apostle Paul encouraged a young pastor named Timothy to also include in his prayers the leaders of the Roman government.

Do I really have to pray for the emperor of the Roman government? One of the emperors

at the time of Paul was Nero. Nero was the emperor who accused the Christians of the fire that burnt down much of Rome. He is the one who supposedly hung Christians on poles, doused them with oil, and then lit them on fire as he gleefully proclaimed, "See what wonderful torches my Christians make." Whether Nero actually said this, we are not certain. We do know he unleashed a terrible persecution on Christians. When tyrants rule the country we have the privilege of praying that God would remove them and provide us decent leaders.

It is so easy to take the peace we enjoy in this country for granted. No one is threatening to harm us as we worship together. No one is knocking at our door to arrest us because we have a Bible prominently displayed in our home. Our sermon for this morning is being recorded and it will go on our web page early this week. People from all over the world can access our teaching. At this time we do not have to suffer reprisals for what we teach as we gather in worship.

It has been said that the twentieth century saw more Christians die for the faith than all the other centuries combined. Hitler, Stalin, Mao and others have accounted for the deaths of millions of Christians. Just recently we heard of an ancient Christian community that used the same Aramaic language Jesus used that is now being persecuted by Islamic extremes that have joined the fighting in Syria. We think of the thousands of Christian people driven from their homes in Ethiopia and other parts of Africa by Muslim warlords.

Should we not be praying more for our government so the precious freedoms we enjoy are not lost? We hear about laws in the state of California that would take away tax exempt status for nonprofit organizations such as the Boy Scouts because they do not allow homosexuals to be troop leaders. Will the day come when we lose our

nonprofit status because we refuse to marry two men or two women? Think of the changes we have seen in society in the last twenty years?

I am the first to admit that I do not pray enough for our government. The words of Paul are speaking to us. Pray for "kings and all those in authority." If someone is not doing their job or if they threaten to take away our freedoms, we can join other Christians and ask the Lord to remove them from office. Psalm 46 says, "The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge.. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire."

When God's people were taken into captivity in the land of Babylon they were told by the Lord, "Also seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers you too will prosper" (Jeremiah 29:7). We pray for good government so we can live peaceful lives in all godliness and holiness. We don't want a hostile government to keep us from freely confessing our faith and bringing God's Word to more people in our land. It is only through the Word that people will be brought into the kingdom of God that lasts forever.

We pray for the kingdom of God

The Apostle Paul gives us a good reason to pray for our government and for the kingdom

of God. He says, "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." When you read the daily news you don't see a headline at the top of the page that reads: "God wants all to be saved." Arching over every natural disaster, every shooting, every act of terrorism and every soldier killed in battle is God's desire to have all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. What about the people who die in Syria, and those who died in the floods in Colorado, or those who perished from floods in Mexico? How many of them died trusting in Jesus for their salvation? God wants us to be saved on come to the knowledge of the truth.

As we sit here this morning, we can think of people we know and love who are still outside the kingdom of God. We pray that they will come to the knowledge of the truth because there is no other way for them to be accepted by God. God's Word is so clear on this point when it says, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave his life as a ransom for all."

In the Revelation John tells us that he had a vision of a large multitude of people standing around the throne of God from every nation, tribe, people and language. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out with loud voices: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb." They were wearing white robes. The question is then asked, "These in white robes, who are they, and where did they come from?" The answer is given: "These are they who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Only the blood of Jesus can wash you clean from your sin. All other religions of the world offer you hope of a better life in the future based on how well you live your life. Only in the kingdom of God are you washed clean by Jesus' blood and given a white robe to wear.

Salvation belongs to God. It is not found in ourselves or what we try to do or in any other religion. It is found only in God. Jesus did everything necessary to wash us clean. He even went so far as to give us the faith to believe in him for our salvation. He gives us the blessing of Holy Baptism to wash away our sin. He gives us his body and blood in the Holy Sacrament totally as a free gift for the forgiveness of sin. As Peter says in Acts 4, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

This past week someone in South Carolina purchased a 400 million dollar lottery ticket. Even after a lump sum payment and taxes there will probably be 150 million dollars left. All that money could not buy even one second of eternity in heaven. All that money could not pay for one small sin. All the good deeds of one lifetime could not wipe away one small thing wrong when I was a child. It is only in Jesus do we find the mediator we need to bring us back to God. He is the ransom payment for the sin of the world. Everything he has done for us is totally free. "By grace you are saved through faith." Even the faith to believe is a gift of God's grace.

What will it take to get this message out to people? Paul says about his own personal life, "And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle- I am telling the truth and not lying- and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles." The Lord allows us and appoints us to live in this country to join with other people in getting the message of salvation out to those who don't believe. The prayers for the kingdom of God become personal as we

ask the Lord to give us the right words to share with others.

We listen to Paul and take his words to heart. "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger and disputing." Our hands are holy hands. We have the privilege of asking the Lord to bless our government and to use us to reach other people for his kingdom. Sometimes we feel like we are little babies just beginning to walk when it comes to prayer especially for our government and for God's kingdom. How soon the little child that just learned to walk is now running across the room. May that be the case with you and me in our life of prayer. Amen.