

October 13, 2019
18th Sunday after Pentecost
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Pray for Peace

Dear Friends in Christ,

The pageant contestant steps up to the microphone to answer the question. “What is your greatest desire for this world.” The stereotypical answer is....”world peace.” I know it is a stereotype and most contestants do not give that kind of answer. It is such an unrealistic answer and desire. This world is full of too many people who don’t get along. In fact, there are lots of people who hate and kill others. World peace? Never going to happen. And in a way I agree.

But when God steps up to the microphone to answer the question, “What is your greatest desire for this world?” he answers, “World peace.” The apostle Paul writes to young pastor Timothy and explains God’s plans for peace in this world and how God accomplishes this peace. As we examine this portion of Paul’s letter to Timothy we also see our role in bringing peace to this world. We are to pray for peace.

1 Timothy 2:1–7 (NIV84)

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time. ⁷ And 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.

Paul lays out God’s plan for peace in this world to Timothy. We know this plan is for all in the world because the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to repeatedly write “all men” and “everyone.” Believers are to pray for all people. God wants all people to be saved. Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all people. This is a universal plan to bring peace to all. This plan has to start with God’s desire to save all people. When sin entered this world in the Garden of Eden, God could have ended the human race on the spot. But he desired to save Adam and Eve and all of their descendants, including you and me. God did not want to remain in a state of war with sinful humans. He wanted peace so that humans could live with him forever.

The second part of the plan is also God’s doing. The Son of God is born of the virgin Mary. He can therefore stand in the place of sinners. As true God and true Man, Christ can be the mediator of peace between God and sinners. But there was a price to pay for peace, a ransom to pay to free sinners from the punishment we deserve. Christ paid the ransom with his own life. There, on the cross, our mediator stood between sinners and God’s wrath. There, on the cross the wrath of God was satisfied. There, on the cross, peace was won between God and sinners. The Son of God accomplished the second part of the plan to save sinners.

The third step in God's plan to bring the peace of forgiveness of sins to all people is to bring them to the "knowledge of the truth." The truth is that Jesus Christ has paid for every sin by his death. The truth is that Christ has accomplished peace with God for every sinner. The war is over. But our sinful human hearts won't believe this message. After Japan surrendered at the end of World War II, there were some Japanese soldiers who did not get the message that peace had been made. So they kept fighting for months, years and even decades after peace had been declared. They either did not know or refused to believe that they were at peace. The natural condition of the human heart is to reject God's declaration of peace through Jesus and continue to fight against the Lord. Only the Holy Spirit can convince a rebellious sinner to lay down his weapons and trust in Christ for peace with God. The Holy Spirit does just that as he brings the gospel to sinners through Word and Sacrament.

And so all of the work to bring sinners peace with God is from God. The Father desires all to be saved. The Son pays the ransom for all people. The Spirit brings people to trust in Christ, to the knowledge of the truth. It is all God's work. But he gives his believers a role in bringing this peace to others. Paul tells us to pray for everyone and especially for our government leaders. The purpose is to allow us to worship the Lord and to live holy lives among our neighbors. For as we worship the Lord we are proclaiming the gospel which the Holy Spirit uses to bring more sinners to the knowledge of the truth. As we live holy lives among others, we have an opportunity to share the reason for the hope we have in Christ. God uses our worship and our daily lives to bring people into contact with his declaration of peace through Jesus.

Paul tells us we are to pray: *for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness*. This is where God's plan begins to encounter trouble. We believers don't always want to pray for our rulers and others in authority. In your mind, pick your least favorite president of the United States. Did you pray for that president? Think about the governors of this state or others states you have lived in. What about your senators and representatives? Have you prayed to the Lord for the mayors and other local leaders?

Of course, we have all kinds of excuses for ignoring God's instructions to pray for our government leaders. What if these leaders are not Christian? What if they advocate policies that are against the Bible? What if they make my life harder because of regulations or taxes? What if I didn't vote for them? What if they are corrupt? What if the government outlaws Christianity? What if the government arrests Christians? What if they feed Christians to the lions and wild beasts or crucifies the Christian leaders? For this is what Nero, Emperor of Rome will do in just a few years, even executing Paul and Peter. If Paul tells believers to pray for Nero, we have no excuses for refusing to pray for a leader today.

Maybe part of our hesitancy to pray for leaders is that we think if we pray for them, we support or agree with what they are doing. But notice what we are to pray: *that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness*. Consider Paul and Timothy under the Roman Empire. While the Roman Empire was not directly friendly to Christians, and had in fact been instrumental in executing Christ, there were blessings of living under the peace of Rome, pax Romana. Paul was able to travel from city to city and province to province with relative safety. The Roman soldiers kept the peace so travel and trade could flourish in the Roman Empire. Paul was a Roman citizen which gave him protections under the law and allowed him to more freely preach the gospel. He actually used the due process he had to appeal his case

to the emperor, Nero, and thus proclaim the gospel to the leaders he prayed for.

Certainly, there are many believers in our world who live under much more oppressive governments than we do in the United States. We have as much peace and freedom to proclaim the gospel and live holy lives among others than at any time or place in history. Sometimes this level of peace and freedom leads to apathy among Christians. Those who experience persecution value their opportunities to gather with other believers for worship. We are tempted to think, “There’s always next week.” The oppressed value their opportunities to let their light shine before others and tell them about Christ. We may think, “I can always do that another time.” Lord, forgive our apathy and lead us to make the most of the time of peace in which we live. Lead us to pray for everyone. Lead us to live in peace with all people as far as it depends on us. Lead us to use the earthly peace we have to point people to the eternal peace Christ gives.

Every believer can pray for their government leaders. We have the freedom in this nation to also vote for the people we want to be our leaders. Part of being a Christian and a citizen of the United States is voting. And if you didn’t know, local elections are coming up next month. And as almost everyone knows, national elections are coming next year. I’m not going to tell you who to vote for. However, from the Word of God before us today we have a question to ask ourselves when voting. Which candidate will allow us to *live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness*? So learn something about the candidates and vote. But whoever wins, pray for them because there is no perfect candidate. Jesus Christ is not on any ballot. And please don’t write him in. He is not a politician.

Jesus lived at peace under the Jewish and Roman authorities of his day. He did not seek to overthrow them though he is the best ruler ever. Instead, he came to offer his life as a ransom kings, presidents, dictators, and every authority, and everyone in the world. Christ gives peace that the world cannot give. And God the Father desires that everyone be saved. May our lives and prayers reflect the same desire – peace with God for the world.

Amen.