

## **“Pray for THEM?”**

**1 Timothy 2:1-7**

**September 22, 2019**

If you have read this week's lectionary readings, you would have read Jeremiah, the prophet who is called the “weeping prophet”, because he grieved for the plight of his people. The people had provoked God's judgment by following foreign gods and now there was no comfort to be found. The plight of his people caused Jeremiah to weep.

The letter Paul wrote to Timothy has a completely different feel; it is one of peaceful, quiet living. Paul writes that God wants all people, all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

I think that I can safely say all people want peaceful quiet lives. Even if they don't believe in one God or Jesus; who gave himself as a ransom for all people - people still want peaceful quiet lives.

But how do we achieve this state of peacefulness and quietness? How do we - as believers in Christ - help bring about the necessary conditions for peace? How do we help bring about quietness - not just within ourselves but within the political and social environment in which we live? How do we help bring about the conditions in which we may live peaceful and quiet lives?

There is no book of instructions that we can read and follow that will guarantee peaceful and quiet living throughout the world - because there are far too many people in every generation and in every place in the world who fear neither God nor man. Saying that, there are still things we can do, that will bring peace and quiet to our hearts and as a result increase the amount of peace and quiet within the world.

279 words, that's correct, I've just said 279 English words! English is great for words. Some countries have official institutes to preserve the purity of their languages. Not English. We take words from anywhere and everywhere and make them our own. Adios amigos! Au revoir, mon ami! Shalom! Krikee! It's all good.

Some of our words go way back. Words like tin and apple - did you know, they both share the same root from ancient Sanskrit. Some of our words may be old, but they can take on new meanings - like apple or apply for instance.

There is a German word, *Schadenfreude*, that describes an emotion that we sometimes experience in our lives. It describes the delight people take in the misfortune of others.

Think about it. Some people enjoy the misfortune that might strike a celebrity. The fascination in the sudden rise of a celebrity is matched only by the satisfaction taken in her or his fall; Felicity Hoffman, Antonio Brown are two examples.

In sports, people who root for one team want their rivals to lose. Back when I lived in Hamilton, Hamiltonians when asked which football team was their favourite usually stated that they had 2 favourite teams. The Hamilton Tiger Cats and any team that beat the Toronto Argonauts.

During times of national crisis there is an overabundance of evil which is directed towards those we considered our enemies, even though history has shown that even bitter enemies, like the Germans, the Japanese - may become our friends.

In the book of Esther, the evil Haman was not content with his good fortune in the government – the thought that Mordecai also was honoured was more than Haman could stand. He thought he would die from his discontent – and he did.

The prophet Jonah was outraged that the Assyrians did not get what they had coming to them, and he didn't hesitate to share these feelings with God.

Jesus was aware that people take no joy in the salvation of those they despise. Last week, the lectionary reading from Luke had some Pharisees and scribes grumbling that, "this fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." God's kingdom is waiting for us, and all we can do is grumble about the guest list.

In today's scripture the apostle Paul is not a Liberal asking us to pray for a Conservative or vice versa. Paul is living in the Roman Empire, and there's an emperor who has declared himself a god. The cry "Caesar is Lord!" is directed to a person of power and majesty. It sounds good, as far as it goes. But then we remember that we proclaim "Jesus is Lord!" Jesus is Lord, the one who was broken on the cross, and now lives.

Still, Paul writes: "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions". That includes Caesar.

It is always appropriate to pray earnestly for leaders and citizens. C.S. Lewis, a member of the Church of England, kept up a long correspondence with a Catholic bishop; they wrote to each other in Latin. Their letters were filled with things that they did not agree on, but there was one thing they could agree on, and that was that they would pray for each other.

I think people are always in favour of praying for those in power – as long as these leaders are members of their political party. In recent years some people have tried to demonize their opponents, so that when the other party is in power, the faith of these leaders - even their humanity - is called into question. To be honest, sometimes I'm just as guilty of this as anyone.

Concerning prayers, Paul writes, "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." (vs 3-4). Everyone. Including those we dislike.

There's a Jewish story about God granting a farmer three wishes, on the condition that this man's hated neighbour would be given double. The farmer first asks for 100 cattle; the neighbour is given 200. The farmer next asks for 100 acres; the neighbour is granted 200 acres. God weeps when the farmer's third wish is that God would strike him blind in one eye.

We cannot receive mercy unless we are ready to celebrate the mercy offered to others. It's not works righteousness; it's mechanics. Close your hand, close your heart, close your eyes, and what can you do?

God invites us to a totally different way of living, turning the world inside out. And the Lord's plan of salvation is there for everyone – the neighbour down the street and the leader we may hate halfway across the county or halfway around the world.

An old adage says that prayer doesn't change things, it changes people and people change things.

Our God also calls us to live by our principles, the principles he has shown us in the person of Jesus and the words contained in this book.

**Our God also calls us to make sacrifices for the sake of justice, for the sake of living quiet and peaceful lives, the sacrifice of sharing the abundant wealth that this earth affords us, the sacrifice of sharing the caring we do for ourselves and our families with strangers and even with our enemies.**

**Our God calls us to prayer - for everybody.**