

“Pray and Then Pray Some More!”

Pentecost 18, I Timothy 2:1-7

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Rev. Rebecca Kemper Poos

Simple Faith and Plain Truth

2 1-3 The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know. Pray especially for rulers and their governments to rule well so we can be quietly about our business of living simply, in humble contemplation. This is the way our Savior God wants us to live.

So, the brethren and sistern have been at this new walk of faith for awhile now. Christians have been around a few decades (or several), and Jesus has not come back as expected. The first generation or two, have already passed from the scene. It's late in the first century, and persecution *of* the Christians has become a part of life. They are still the “outlaw” religion. The new, suspect, kid on the block.

The writer of I Timothy is giving very practical advice on how to “hang in there”, deal with the current situation, and adjust to life in these days and times. The current rulers and “community leaders” are not ruling in a way that they felt good about. Their values of community and compassion that they held dear as Christians—those who followed that “Way of Jesus”—was not *really* reflected in their government or civic life. Jesus’ teachings were definitely not being held up as the model, and followed by the powers that be.

They didn’t know what to do about this. How to respond. It wasn’t a democracy, by any means! But, even so, there was a huge disconnect from the way they had come to understand life, love of neighbor and community, that was excruciatingly different from the public life they found themselves in the

middle of.

In fact, this advice from the author is partly a “protest measure”—a strategy to get the monkey off their back. Get the powers that be to leave them alone as this rebel cult, so they could “get about their quiet lives!”

Yet it’s not just saying “pray for the rulers and their governments so they’ll get out of your hair! Give us some breathing space here.”

No, not anymore than we should pray for our leaders so the ones WE want will get elected, or they’ll direct public policy the way WE think it ought to be done!

“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.”

II. PRAY FOR THOSE THAT.....

What would this be like?

To pray FOR the leaders, those in charge, those who perhaps make us a little crazy? Not just a passing, ceremonial, prayer once in awhile, like an Invocation at a formal affair?

But, a concerted, devoted, intentional effort—maybe *every* day—to pray for (not just pray ABOUT!) those in government, leadership, power?

It’s probably not a hard thing to consider doing for the ones you like, right? What about those folks you just *don’t* like? What about the opposition? The ones you disagree with, whose values, moral, ethics, leadership strategies, you are concerned about? I know *lots* of you feel we don’t have a good candidate to choose from in this presidential election, and you don’t know *how* to pray about it!

Perhaps we step back and consider what prayer is for a

moment—before we consider further how we might pray for *all* in leadership.

Prayer is *not* about a specific outcome. About God answering our wants and wishes yay or nay. Prayer is not about my way or the high way. If my prayers aren't answered to my liking, then either: there is NO God, or I don't like that God's ways of doing things so I'm outta here!

Prayer is a way of being. A relationship. A ways of being *in* relationship with your Creator, your Source.

Some have reflected on prayer in these ways:

Corrie ten Boom, 20th century

"Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?"

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, 19th century

"Be not forgetful of prayer. Every time you pray, if your prayer is sincere, there will be new feeling and new meaning in it, which will give you fresh courage, and you will understand that prayer is an education."

Soren Kierkegaard, 19th century

"Prayer does not change God, but it changes the one who prays."

Frederick Douglass, 19th century

"I prayed for twenty years but received no answer until I prayed with my legs."

Rev. Vicki Kemper (no relation!) Reflects on this sticky issue of praying for those that torment us, or are just not easy to pray for without our own agenda. Or even just disease.

So That
Vicki Kemper

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of [God] . . ." - Matthew 5:43-44

I've never found "because I said so" a very compelling reason to do something. But whenever I resisted my parents' instructions or talked back or asked why, "Because I said so" was the answer I got.

"I'm the boss of you," in other words. Yes, I know: Sometimes it's the last card remaining in an exasperated parent's hand. And it's almost always for our own good.

But Jesus wasn't interested in being anyone's boss. (As far as we know, he never said, "Argh! Because I'm the Lord, that's why!) He came that we might have life, and his *radical* love showed us what that is.

Still, he realized some of his teachings would strike us as impractical, impossible, or just plain ridiculous. He knew we would balk and ask why:

I'm supposed to love a mass murderer, Jesus? Really? I'm supposed to pray for a racist bully? You've got to be kidding. And that person in church who annoys me to no end? Come on.

But Jesus doesn't play the boss card—or even the savior card. Instead, he offers explanations, incentives, and his own life.

"*So that*," he says.

Love your enemies so that resentment and bitterness won't eat *you* alive. Love your enemies so that you might be delivered from the prison of us-them thinking.

Love your enemies so that all the faults you project onto others might be healed within yourself. Love your enemies so that God might find a dwelling place in you.

Pray for those who persecute you so that you might come to realize how much they're like you: wounded, frightened,

precious, hungry for love, and usually doing the best they can. Pray for them so that you can live more fully as a beloved child of God. Pray for them that we might be one, siblings all.

Prayer

O God, for the good of myself and the world, help me to love that person. Help me to see your face in them so that I might also love myself. Amen.

From Blindfolds to 20/20 Vision

Ron Buford remembers trying to teach this idea to children: A dear pastor friend asked me for a children's sermon idea on Saul becoming blinded while on his way to persecute Christians, regaining his vision, and then becoming the great apostle Paul.

The children's sermon was to be used during an afternoon Vacation Bible School, to give the teachers a brief break. I suggested blindfolds. He tried it: kids became disoriented, bumping into each other like bumper cars; some were distressed because they couldn't put on their blindfolds; many began to cry. Desperate, the pastor called the teachers back from break early.

Since then, my pastor friend has not asked me for another children's sermon idea.

We sometimes pray as if we know what we need. But our uninformed prayer focus is often like blindfolding ourselves, getting into our cars and driving someplace new.

Young Solomon, who inherited his father David's throne, does not pray for armies, or chariots, or concubines. Recognizing these as blindfolds, he prays for wisdom to lead the nation, which God grants, making him Israel's wisest leader.

Solomon first recognizes his powerlessness before God. Second, he honors and believes in the greatness of his people. Third, he asks for God's wisdom, the 20/20 vision he needs beyond human knowledge.

This is not only a wise formula for leaders; it is a wise formula to lead each day. So what's it going to be today? Blindfold or God's 20/20 vision?

Being leaven in any age—Kate Huey

“Perhaps leading a prayerful life is a way of being leaven in any age, no matter how small and seemingly powerless you may be in the midst of a large and intimidating culture. We imagine, then, the tiny little Christian churches long ago as leaven in the oppressive culture of imperialism and brute power that surrounded them.”

What would the world be like if we Christians were truly leaven? In whatever age and stage we found ourselves? If leading a prayerful life, praying for the rulers and the governments—not just to blindly support and submit, but to challenge where needed. To surround in love and light, to earnestly desire and pray for wise, compassionate, leadership with integrity in all things?

And---to model that *ourselves* in all our doings. Doing our part to work for the common good for all—working alongside our rulers and governments—putting legs to our prayers.

THERE'S MORE

And then, the scripture goes on! Just when we thought we had that nailed down—there's more to do.

Huey continues:

“Not just the rulers deserve our prayers, the scripture says, but everyone does. And that's not all, just in case you weren't feeling challenged enough already: God desires that every single person will be saved. No one is worthless, no one is beyond God's thoughts or the reach of God's mercy. It isn't my God against your God, but our one God who loves everyone.

How, then, are we to make our way and to live faithfully in a country where we are, for the most part, free from the persecution suffered by these early Christians, in fact, where

the "powers that be" actually call themselves Christian?

Here we have instructions: remember that there is one God ("God is God, and you're not") and that God loves every single person and doesn't want to lose a single one (last week's reading about lost coins and sheep is helpful here), and, in every case, pray always.

Pray first, last, and at all times, and pray not just for yourself and your own, but for all of God's children. If we pray in all things and in all times, perhaps it won't be so hard to get along with one another, and with our rulers and kings, as we make our way toward the truth."

KEY:

So, there are lots of ways to do it. And lots of reasons why. Even if it's the less-than-stellar motivation of getting people out of your hair! Getting Big Brother off your shoulder!

But, I urge you, brothers and sisters, to pray. Pray every which way you know how. Or even if you don't! Pray upside down and inside out. Pray without ceasing. Pray, and then pray some more!

Commit to praying FOR those who persecute you. For your enemies. Those who wish you harm. And, pray for those who lead. Lead our communities, our states our country, our world. Don't have an agenda for them as you pray. Trying to sway them to your way of thinking. Don't pray that candidates will win or lose.

Pray, instead, for yourself and your own beloved community to be leaven, and then pray for each person in leadership you can think of. Pray for wisdom from God; for 20/20 vision in guiding and healing our fractured and hurting human race.

It can be helpful to picture a circle of love and light surrounding the person as you pray. Kind of like those water bubbles the kids play in at the pond!

Surround the person in love and light, with wisdom and vision—remembering how much they're like you: wounded, frightened, precious, hungry for love, and usually doing the best they can.

Pray for them so that you can live more fully as a beloved child of God. That *you* might be changed, opened, softened. SO THAT together, you might be leaven for the world—in the most unexpected of places.

And if your prayers don't seem to work. If it seems to go nowhere, or you have a hard time wanting or remembering to do it. Then.....pray some more!

Amen.