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## The Eight Sunday after Pentecost July 24, 2022

### Lord, Teach Us to Pray

In countless languages over 2,000 years followers of Jesus have prayed the Lord's Prayer. The prayer is regularly prayed at Christian worship and in the Christian home. In seven short petitions we ask our heavenly Father for the most important blessings of life. Of the seven, only one seeks the physical blessing of daily bread; all the rest ask for spiritual gifts and guidance. Jesus taught the Church to pray "Our Father" knowing that his perfect life and death would cover our sins and make us the children of God. The Lord's Prayer is the theme of our worship.

### Sermon 1 Timothy 2:1-7

#### Salvation is at the Heart of Prayer

**I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.**

Introduction – When we pray, we're usually talking to God about what's on our mind. Sometimes what's on our mind is pretty trivial. We think about the Packers pre-season starting on Monday and we say, "God, please let the Packers go to the Super Bowl this year." Sometimes what's on our mind is more serious. We start a new job or a new school year and we say, "God, please let everything go well." Sometimes what's on our mind is almost life and death. We wait for the doctor to call and we say, "God, please let the test results be good." None of us prays to God as often as we should, but when we do pray, it's almost always because we have something on our mind.

In the Gospel for today, Luke recorded the prayer Jesus encouraged believers to pray. We call it the Lord's Prayer and we all know the traditional version from memory. Jesus suggested this prayer at least twice, once at the end of the Sermon on the Mount and again here, 18 months later. The prayer in Matthew's Gospel and the prayer in Luke's Gospel aren't exactly the same. Jesus wasn't really interested in precise wording. He was actually interested in subjects or ideas or concepts that he wanted his followers to have on their minds. To Jesus, these ideas are the most important things Christians can think about. Jesus wants us to think about his name and his Word and making it an absolute priority our lives. Jesus wants us to think about his kingdom and his grace and how it comes to us and gets to others. Jesus wants us to think about his will and his plans for our lives. Obviously, he wants the forgiveness of sins to be on our minds. He wants us to remember that the devil tempts us to sin and that we need his power to resist temptation. Jesus wants us to think about the evil that can come into our lives and that only he can deliver us. There are seven ideas or concepts in the Lord's Prayer, and only one of them has to do with physical things: Give us this day our daily bread. Even that prayer reminds us that Jesus gives us blessings he knows we need, not always blessings we want. So six of the seven prayers in the Lord's Prayer—and even the daily bread prayer—have to do with spiritual ideas and concepts that affect us as

individual believers. When we pray, Jesus wants our life with God to be on our minds. Our salvation is really at the heart of the Lord's Prayer.

In the Second Reading for today, St. Paul seems to be going in a different direction. He's not talking about praying for blessings for ourselves; he wants us to pray for others. He wrote, **I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people.** Paul was writing to Timothy and Timothy was Paul's representative in the city of Ephesus. In this First Letter to Timothy, Paul was sending some practical instructions about worship. Paul wanted these prayers for all people to be included in Sunday worship. The Christian Church picked up on Paul's directions and this is a custom we still follow today. Right after the Creed we join in the Prayer of the Church—we used to call it the General Prayer. This prayer means to be a prayer "for all sorts and conditions of men." If you've noticed, we usually pray for all kinds of people in this prayer. Often, we also pray for the government.

It's interesting that Paul mentions government specifically: **I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and those in authority.** Paul could have pointed to the sick and the dying or parents and children, but he mentions the government. He urges four different kinds of prayers. The congregation is to speak **petitions** and ask God to guide the government to solve specific problems: Help the government deal with inflation. Paul urges worshipers to speak **prayers** for regular and on-going needs: Enable the government to defend our nation's laws. **Intercession** is a difficult concept to explain. It seems to mean prayers that come from deep in our hearts that pray for the good of the government: Lord, we beg you to lead our government to overcome its bickering and deal with the problems facing our nation. **Thanksgiving** is obvious. Paul and the Holy Spirit want us to give thanks for the leaders we have. Certainly, we're to speak all of these prayers for everybody; Paul did write **all people**. But he also wrote that we are to speak these prayers specifically **for kings and those in authority.**

You and I live in a nation which has become ruptured over government. More and more the attitudes of U.S. citizens are leaning in two very different and opposite directions. The more people become polarized, the angrier they get. We see anger and disagreement turn into violence, not just violent actions but violent words. You probably know that politics these days is ruining friendships and even affecting families and marriages. Christians can't escape this; it's the society we live in. There are some faithful Lutherans who wouldn't pray for a Democrat if their life depended on it and other Lutherans who feel exactly the same about Republicans. Bringing politics to the pulpit and then to the altar just seems so absolutely unspiritual. We're worn out by this stuff. Politics is not something we want to be on our minds when we come to church. The trouble is, Paul wrote and the Spirit led him to write: Pray for **kings and those in authority.** What are we going to do with this?

First of all, Paul wasn't writing about politics and he certainly wasn't taking sides. The king in Paul's day was the emperor Nero. Nero and the Roman government would rather kill Christians than look at them. But Paul has a reason for encouraging us to pray for the government. He presents a summary of God's plan to save: **God our Savior wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.** You know what the Bible says. Satan slithered into the Garden of Eden and brought sin crashing down on every descendant of Adam and Eve. There was a time in our lives when the weight of sin crushed us and the threat of hell smothered us. From the start God was determined to change that. His plan was to lift that boulder off the human race. He wanted to save the world and he wants to save us. He wants people everywhere to know the truth about his love and his plan to save.

God's plan to save was the only plan that worked. Paul wrote, **For there is one God**—in other words, there is no other God but this true God. And he went on: **And one mediator between God and mankind**—there is no one else who can bring God and people together. He identifies the mediator: **the man Christ Jesus.** There is no other way to get out from under the crush of sin and the threat of hell besides God's way. God's way was to send his Son as a human being who could get between God and us. Jesus carried the weight of sin for us; he felt the crush of death in our place. Paul wrote, **He gave himself as a ransom for all people.** He broke out of his tomb to guarantee this and then he appointed his followers—that's us—to spread the good news. Paul saw all this happening. Jesus' work to save, Paul wrote, **has now been witnessed to at the proper time.** Paul understood his part of the plan: **For this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth; I am not lying—and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.** Paul understood that Jesus came not just for some people but for all people.

In these three short verses to Timothy, St. Paul laid out the plan of salvation. Jesus came to make us the children of God and to make God our Father. He wants us and all people to believe God's promises. He carried out God's will and he forgives our sins. He protects us when Satan tempts us and preserves us from evil. Those are the truths Jesus wants to be on our mind and those are the truths we think about in the Lord's Prayer.

So why in the world does Paul urge us to pray for the government? Why does he have to get us into politics? Here's the reason: Pray for the government, Paul wrote, **that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Savior.** Really, it's all about salvation. God wants us to be able to worship and study the Bible without national distractions and calamities. He wants us to live our lives without the threat of persecution. He wants to rid us of pressures that interfere with our Christian life style. He wants us to have the time and the money to share his love with others close by and far away. He wants lines of communication like the internet and Facebook and Twitter to be open for the spread of the gospel. The government has a role to play in all of this. The government is part of the daily bread we need in our lives. We pray for the government to bring stability and calm so that we might live our lives as Christians and spread Christ's love to the world. It's all about salvation.

Not much stability and calm these days, right? Sometimes governments seem to be raging out of control and sometimes we may even be part of the problem. Paul urges us to say our prayers with **kings and those in authority** in our minds. And whether we pray the Lord's Prayer or pray for all people or pray for the government, salvation is always at the heart of our prayers. Amen.