

INI

1 Timothy 2,1-8

Thanksgiving — 24 November 2016

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Epistle lesson, which was read earlier:

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions [or, intercessions] and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,² for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and dignity.

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: Wars and the ensuing chaos do not bring out the best in people or society. Often, order breaks down and not only do normal governmental controls break down, but disease and want spread.

One of the best historical examples of the disintegration of parts of society occurred during the Thirty Years' War, which ravaged much of Germany from 1618 to 1648. Although it began over religious questions, it soon had nothing to do with religion, and great and small powers fought over the control of Central Europe. In addition to this, soon, independent mercenary bands ravaged the countryside. Order broke down. Plague and pestilence and want and disorder spread.

In 1637, in the small German town of Eilenburg, which is about 10 miles northeast of Leipzig in Saxony, after having been ravished by war and disorder, plague struck the city. Martin Rinkart was one of several

Lutheran pastors in the city, but he was the only one who stayed after the outbreak of plague. In the face of the devastation of war and pestilence, people were reduced to eating dogs and cats to keep from starving. Rinkart supervised the burial of some 4,480 people, including his wife and several of his children.

In the face of this, one might think that Rinkart would have just given up hope. Rinkart, however, turned to the book of Ecclesiasticus, and drew hope from the following:

And now bless the God of all,
Who in every way does great things,
Who exalts our days from birth,
And seals with us according to His great mercy.
May He give us gladness of heart,
And grant that peace may be in our days in Israel,
As in the days of old.
May he entrust us to His mercy!
And let Him deliver us in our days! (Eccl 50,22-24)

Rinkart was surrounded by death and devastation, and it had even touch his own family. Yet after reading these words, Rinkart sat down and penned the words of the hymn we just sing, “Now Thank We All Our God.”

This brings me to this Thanksgiving Day’s sermon theme: “**The Attitude Is Gratitude.**” I’ll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) Praying For All;**
- 2) Jesus Died For All;** and,
- 3) Giving Thanks For All And In All**

1) Praying For All. Paul is writing to Timothy, his son in the faith. Timothy had gone to Ephesus and there was teaching the truths of

the faith and also combating false teachers and false doctrine.

The false teachers were saying that Jesus did not die for all, but only for a select few. They also taught that the material world was worthless and to be despised, and so were its institutions, such as marriage, family, and government. They taught that only a secret, special knowledge could free them from this evil world and that Jesus' "real mission" was to impart this so-called secret knowledge. They were like little kids who would root through a cereal box to get out the secret decoder ring to read secret message instead of listening to the clear teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

Paul's letter to Timothy refutes all of these false teachings and false teachers.

If the false teachers despised government, Paul tells Timothy we are to pray for all in authority.

Paul speaks of "entreaties and prayers, petitions [or, intercessions] and thanksgivings," and while there are almost synonymous, there are differences. But the thread which binds them together is thanksgiving; for all, prayer is to be made with the giving of thanks.

Is Paul being unrealistic in asking that we are to be thankfully praying for those in authority? After all, throughout history there have been some pretty awful rulers – and one at the top of the historical list was the Roman emperor who was ruling while Paul was writing, that is, Nero, who would later go on to blame Christians for the great fire of Rome and then persecute them, resulting in the deaths of the apostles Paul and Peter, among countless others.

In speaking of governmental authority, Luther said:

The greatest necessity in the world is a strict temporal power. The

world cannot be ruled according to the Gospel, for the sphere of influence which the Word [of God] has is too small and limited. Therefore you cannot establish an external rule with it. The Holy Spirit has a little flock. The rest are all harlots and rogues. They require a temporal sword. If temporal power does not administer justice strictly, everyone grabs what he can. Then follow rebellion, murdering, warring, ravishing of wife and children, so that no one can live securely. Mr. Everybody is no Christian. The king, the princes, and the lords must use the sword; capital punishment must continue that the others may be kept in fear, and the pious may hear the Gospel and tend to their own work, and everybody be orderly and at rest. The apostles had a great concern for the temporal sword. (Plass, ed., *What Luther Says*, # 1791, from a sermon on 24 March 1525 on 1 Timothy)

Thus, even for those such as Nero, we are to pray and give thanks. To what end? That we may lead a peaceful life and that others may come to a knowledge of the truth of God's plan of salvation in Christ Jesus. For here we see that,

2) Jesus Died For All. The Good News is that Christ did die for all. He did not die for a select, small group – but for all: Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free, and so forth.

Paul speaks of Jesus as having given His life as a ransom, and the word “ransom” is only used here in the New Testament. To pay a ransom in Paul's time usually meant to redeem a slave and buy his freedom. Here it means that Jesus, true Man and true God, died, and His death paid the price to redeem us from sin, death and the power of the devil. By nature, this unholy trio would hold us captive and in spiritual bondage in slavery. Jesus, however, paid the ransom price we could not pay in order to secure our freedom.

Paul stresses that Jesus was truly human, as human as you and I.

He wasn't a pretend Savior Who could not feel pain or the agonies of death itself. As true Man, Jesus died the death we should have died; as true God, His payment is good for all mankind.

Jesus died once for all. Since all sin, all need the redemption that only Jesus can offer.

And Jesus is the only Mediator between God and man. There is no other mediator between God and man except Jesus. Thus, Paul shows the false teachers are liars when they claim to rely on genealogies or angels to mediate between man and God. Paul would be shocked to learn that later people would pray to him or other saints, instead of to the one and only Mediator God has Given, Jesus.

Having died and risen from the dead, Jesus ascended into heaven where He intercedes for us.

Our response to this incredible sacrifice and this incredible redemption can only be a life of gratitude. And in gratitude, we should be

3) Giving Thanks For All And In All. As Luther put it so well, even though God gives daily bread to all, both the good and the bad, we pray that He would open our eyes to this and that we would receive our daily bread with thanksgiving – with gratitude.

While Jesus died for all, all do not know this.

On the old TV show, “Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?”, the host asked that question. The audience all wanted to be millionaires and roared back its teleprompted response, “We do!”

But if we ask the question, “Who wants to be assured of eternal salvation and life with Jesus now and forever,” we often get a different

reaction: fanatic, screwball, leave me alone, don't be like the people with signs on street corners.

But Paul says that God's plan is that all be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, which is another way of saying Christ died for all.

In His death and resurrection, Jesus makes all peoples millionaires and more in the "game" of eternal life. The tragedy is two-fold: many do not know it, and many not only do not want to know it but reject it.

Jesus has indeed given us a treasure – but it is no secret, and one doesn't need a magic decoder ring to figure it out. He has given us His Word and the Sacrament, the means through which the Holy Spirit works to bring people to faith.

After having been brought to a knowledge that trusts that Jesus has died and rose for us, paying for all our sins, it is only in humble confession and contrition that we see all the bounty God has given us. Gratitude indeed opens our eyes and hearts not only to appreciate the world He has given to us, but in all times and in all places to thank Him for His benefits.

Paul says that men everywhere are to lift up their hands in prayer, in graticule, and without anger or dissension. To lift up the hands was one of the ways in which we may prayer – but the emphasis is not on the posture of prayer, which can vary, but on the attitude of the heart, "without anger and dissension."

Anger comes from the inside out. And can manifest itself in outbursts or simmering resentment. Anger is often directed at the circumstances and person who and which surround us. Dissension quite literally means evil, reprehensible thoughts – evil thoughts against other persons or perhaps even God Himself.

When we combine anger and dissension, we have the picture of a person who thinks that the world is unfair and everyone and everything around him should change so that he can become happier. This is opposed to the proper attitude to pray for change from within.

There is a poem by Edward Arlington Robinson that captures this inward anger and dissension.

Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn,
Grew lean while he assailed the season;
He wept that he was ever born,
And he had reasons.

The poem goes on. Poor Miniver Cheevy. He felt that he hadn't been born at the right time of the right place and was dissatisfied with all about him. Nothing gave him satisfaction. Anger and resentment characterized his inward being, and at the end of the poem we find he sought solace in drink.

Contrast this with the scene on Good Friday as Jesus hung on the Cross.

For what did Jesus pray? "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"

What about the two insurrectionists crucified on either side of Jesus. One mocked Jesus, saying, "If you're the Messiah, save us and yourself." The other, looking around and knowing that not much was going to change with a cohort of Roman soldiers standing there, prayed to Jesus, "Jesus, Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And how did Jesus respond? Jesus said, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise."

Here Jesus answers a prayer with a promise. The promise is that

while the outward circumstances of life may not change, Jesus would die and rise again so that He would secure for the penitent thief and us a better life, a promise of a heavenly home.

Conclusion: Viktor Frankel, a psychiatrist who survived Auschwitz, wrote a book, *Man's Search For Meaning*. In that book he tells of being shown a picture of a concentration camp and he was asked how he felt at the awfulness of looking at that picture. He said that the shadows told him that it was close to supper time. Even there, one could be thankful for a piece of bread and watery soup.

Thanksgiving means that the attitude should be gratitude. Gratitude for all that God is giving to us, the gifts that support both our bodies but most importantly that support our souls. Gratitude for the ransom that Jesus has paid, freeing us from sin and death.

Under the Cross of Christ, we stand, humbled, and confess our sins, so that trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection, we receive the forgiveness He was won for us.

Forgiven hands are holy hands. And we lift up our hands in prayer and thanksgiving – thanking Jesus for the ability to live with Him now, in good times and bad, and to live with Him forever in that place where He has banished tears, pain, suffering, and the last enemy, death itself.

Indeed, with forgiven hearts and holy hands and redeemed voices, “Now Thank We All Our God.” Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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