

Rev. Gregory Gibbons
Lola Park Lutheran Church
Redford, MI 48239

I Timothy 2:1-8

ARE YOU TAKING THE TIME TO PRAY FOR EVERYONE?

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We have a little less than two months before the big Presidential election. I'm sure that most of us can't wait until it's over. This has been a nasty one and I'm afraid that it is only going to get nastier. There are probably a number of reasons for this. There are far more media outlets than ever before. At one time there were three networks that carried the news. Today there are many more networks that carry the news and like to shape the news to their own slant. There are those who favor Hillary Clinton and there are those that favor Donald Trump. They will use soundbites to their candidate's advantage. When their candidate makes a gaffe, they can choose not to air it. And then there is the social media: Facebook, Twitter and more. They immediately put out stories that are prejudiced toward a certain candidate.

If you have ever been interviewed you know that you can make a person say just about anything you want. You spend 45 minutes with the interviewer and there might be 20 seconds of what you said. Yes, you did answer a question in a certain way, but they can make it sound as though you gave that answer to a different question. Certainly we do not take a person's words and actions in the kindest possible manner.

Have you taken the time to pray for the candidates lately? And if so, what are you praying for? It becomes very easy for us to pray for certain things in regard to one candidate and for other things in regard to the other? Are you praying for our present President and members of Congress? The apostle Paul has some words for us this morning that are good for us to hear. "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." ARE YOU TAKING THE TIME TO PRAY FOR ALL PEOPLE?

Am I taking the time to pray for all people? How could we possibly do that? There are some ten billion people in the world. We certainly couldn't pray for everyone individually. We don't know them. We don't know their names or all the countries. And there certainly are people we don't like! Nevertheless Paul urges us to pray for everyone.

If we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that our prayer list is probably pretty short. We pray for ourselves, our spouse, our children, brothers and sisters. We pray for the members of our congregation and hopefully for our pastor. We hear of a person that is experiencing difficult times and we say that we will pray for them. But I don't think that we "pray continually" as Paul urged the believers in Thessalonica.

I am assuming that we all believe that prayer is a good thing and that if people like Paul and Moses and Abraham and David and certainly our Lord Jesus urge us to pray then we want to do it. But we know that our flesh is weak. We don't set our priorities like we should. Dr. Martin Luther said, "I have so many things I have to do today that I have to spend twice the time in prayer to get them all done!" He knew that prayer does accomplish things. He knew that the Lord does bless our efforts as we go to him in prayer.

Our Lord Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven." Last week we studied the story of Paul. He described himself as a

“blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man.” Do you think that many of the first century believers prayed for this man? Do you think that they prayed that Paul would see his sin and see his Savior? I have to believe that they did. And their prayers were heard, even though it may have seemed very unlikely. Paul urges us to do the same.

We are to pray for kings and for all those in authority. We may not agree with the philosophy of a certain President, governor, mayor or others. That does not mean that we are not to pray for them. The Emperor of Rome when Paul wrote this letter was Nero, one of the most evil men of all history. Tradition holds that both Paul and Peter were put to death under the authority of Nero. Many Christians would be put to death under his leadership. And yet Paul prayed for such a man.

What would Paul pray for? God wants all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. We pray that God would give our leaders wisdom to lead people. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. True wisdom can only come from knowing the Lord Jesus. We pray that all of our leaders turn to God. If they are grounded in the Word, they will treat all people in love and humility. It does not matter whether a person is black, yellow, red or white. We are all part of the same race, the human race, descended from Adam and Eve. We are all souls that our Lord Jesus died for on the cross of Calvary. It does not matter whether we are rich or poor. God is the giver of all things. He urges us to share with those who have less so that we can practice our Christian love. It does not matter whether we are young or old. We are to protect the lives of those who cannot speak for themselves: the unborn, the infants, the elderly, the weak. We are to speak up so that there is truly justice for all. Yes, we must pray for our leaders so that all are protected!

We want all to come to a knowledge of the truth. That is very difficult when our society sees no such thing as absolute truth. You have your truth and I have mine and they are all equal. That simply cannot be. Black cannot be white and up cannot be down. A man cannot be a woman simply by saying that he feels like one. I don't care what political correctness says. Truth must always expose lies! The Church must always stand tall in the face of the shifting winds of the world's logic.

Paul reminds us that there is one God. There are not many gods all equally valid. The First Commandment tells us, “You shall have no other gods. Every culture had its own gods. The people worshipped them but they worshipped idols. The one and only true God is the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Any other god is a worthless imitation. There is only one way to heaven and that is through Jesus Christ and him alone. He is not a truth. He is the Truth. He is the Mediator between God and man.

He is the Mediator, the go-between. He is both God and man. He had to be both. Sin had separated us from God. The penalty for sin was death. We needed a ransom to be paid that would free us from our slavery to sin, death and the power of Satan. All the money in the world could not do that. There was only one thing that could accomplish that. “Jesus would give himself as a ransom for all people.”

In order to be our Savior, Jesus had to be both God and man. This is one of the mysteries of the Christian faith that we cannot logically explain. Jesus had to be God so that his perfect life and substitutionary death could count for the sin of not just some, not just many, but for the sin of the world. He had to be God so that he could keep his promise to rise from the dead and destroy the power of death forever. He had to be man so that he could be put under the very same law that condemns us and in order to suffer and die. Jesus was both God and man in the same person. We may not be able to understand it but it is certainly true and the very heart of what we believe, teach, and confess!

There is urgency in our prayer. We don't know how long we have here on earth. Every day we read obituaries in the paper. Some people lived a very long life. Others didn't. Now is the time. We once again remind ourselves that

Jesus came for everyone. He came for Republicans and Democrats and communists alike. He came for people living in the United States, Canada, Mexico and everyone on every continent.

In our Gospel reading this morning we read about a very dishonest man. He was caught red-handed. He spent all his time thinking of a plan where he could come out looking good. Jesus did not commend his dishonesty, but rather his shrewdness in trying to land on his feet. We could certainly use that kind of zeal in our prayer life!

Pray for everyone! How do we do that? There are a number of things that we can do. First of all, find a set time or times to pray. What works well for you? Is it early in the morning or at night just before you go to bed? Perhaps it is a time during the day when you have a break or during lunch hour. There might be another time like when you drive to work. Secondly make a list of people for whom to pray. I would encourage you to write it down. You will start with your family members and close friends. That is very natural. Then just start to expand it. There are the people on your block and the people you work with. There are the people in your congregation and the people in other congregations. There are pastors and teachers and missionaries all over the world. There is the President of the United States, the members of Congress, the Supreme Court, the governor, the state legislature, the mayor of your city, the members of our Armed Forces, the police and fire departments, your barber, your baker, your butcher and many others. You pray for people who are suffering from cancer or recovering from a heart attack. You pray for people who suffer from anxiety and mental health issues. You can pray for specific people on certain days of the week. You can easily expand that prayer list.

It is a matter of priorities. We all have 24 hours in each day. There is a time for us to work, a time to eat, a time to sleep and a time to spend with our families. There is a lot of time left over to read the Scriptures, to have devotions, and to pray. Even if you are only spending five minutes a day now, you could easily double or triple the time. And as you do that, you will find more people for whom to pray. You will realize more and more that God wants all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. And as you do that, you will also pray that God uses you to be the answer to your own prayer. May God move us to pray for everyone! AMEN.