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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Sunday, September 22, 2019
15th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 25/Proper 20/Year C
Primary Text: 1 Timothy 16:1-13
Sermon Title: “*The Quiet and Peaceable Life*”

Theme

The Pastoral Epistles offer insight into how early Christians understood many practical matters, such as church administration and worship. The church’s focused prayer for others is an expression of the single-minded passion God has toward us in Jesus.

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Sermon

The title of the sermon today is what God intends for all creation, but especially for all believers: "The Quiet and Peaceable Life."

Now this may come as a surprise to you, but some people don't seem to aspire to the quiet and peaceable life that God intends for us. There are members of this church who seem to thrive on drama, to the degree that if there is no drama in their life, they seem to create it. If anyone identifies themselves this way, though I doubt anyone does even though they should, those folks are turning their backs on one of the sweetest blessings God wants to give us.

But, as we shall learn as we take a look at the Second Reading from First Timothy, we co-create the quiet and peaceable life with God. Let us see how that is done.

The Apostle Paul is the supposed author of this letter which is known as a pastoral epistle. It is known as a pastoral epistle, a fancy synonym for *letter*, because it serves as continuing education for Timothy, the letter's recipient, whom Paul left in charge of the fledgling church in Ephesus.

As is often the case with any new organization, the church at Ephesus was dealing with controversy. We might have expected this for two reasons. One) without Paul there to exercise apostolic authority over the orthodoxy of the young church, there were those who filled that leadership vacuum with their own ideas for how things ought to be. This is identified by Paul as false teachings and so his letters to Timothy are both encouragement to him to stick to what he, Paul, has taught, and continuing education to teach Timothy that which he did not have the time to teach him when he was in Ephesus and how to respond to these issues that have since surfaced.

And 2) the second reason we might have expected the controversy that elicited this letter is because, as I have already said, some people just like controversy. They like to just stir things up. And Paul wrote that this simply is not of God, and must be stopped.

Good stuff for us to know to don't you think? And how do we go about this? I am so glad you asked.

In the first verse of this passage, Paul wrote, "First of all." So let's take note, something significant is about to be written.

¹First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made

First of all, wrote Paul, we should begin all things with prayer. In fact, he more than simply wrote it, he wrote, "I urge" meaning that this is much more than good advice. So the first thing we should note is that we should begin everything with prayer.

Do you do that? I confess I don't, but this week the preacher is being taught by his own sermon. We should start our day in prayer. Maybe while we are just waking up and coming around; maybe even before our feet hit the floor we should pray. By the way, Martin Luther wrote a morning prayer and here it is:

"I thank you, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen."

Do you like that prayer? Go to the website, ZionOhio.org and download this very sermon and it will be there on page three, or you can just search for it on the internet and you will find it.

But Paul wasn't just concerned about starting one's day with prayer, he was concerned about starting *everything* we do with prayer. Did you know that as many of the worship leaders as we can gather before a service, pray together? We do. That was started by the leader of the Pray Table, Scott Ackerman, although Joan Gent has been doing it on Saturday night forever.

Are you aware that the Kyrie, the first part of our traditional liturgical worship service is a prayer? And then we follow that musical prayer with the Prayer of the Day. So, at least on Sunday morning we do begin our worship services with prayer.

But back to Paul's instruction to Timothy. Paul wrote that we should offer

supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings

Today is not the day to go into the differences in these types of prayer but they are different. And who should these supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for? Once again, a great question. Paul wrote,

for everyone, ²for kings and all who are in high positions

Everyone, by definition would mean that no one is left out of our prayers. So let us review this. Church, everyone would exclude whom? *No one*. So that means those people at work or at school or at home, maybe your ornery neighbors who you don't like, and can't seem to get along with. In fact, since some of us just need drama in our lives, those whom I am talking about probably think the problem is us! And they might be right!

Paul wrote that we should pray for everyone and I am teaching you that everyone includes everyone, including people you have issues with. I could list some issues that people often recite, but what is the point, Paul wrote we should pray for them!

And he also specifically wrote that we should pray for "kings and all who are in high positions." Well, of course, that doesn't mean we need a list of all the world's monarchs so that we can pray for them. It means we should pray for all people in positions of leadership over us and all people of the world. We should pray for them whether they are of our own political persuasion or not. And why would we Republicans pray for Democrats, and people from democratic countries pray for communist countries, and predominately white Christian nations pray for predominately Asian atheist countries?

so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.

Now, back in 2008 we elected Barack Obama as our 44th president. As you know, he was the first African American to be elected to that high office. From the time he was elected to the time he took office and then for a long time after that, I added a petition to the Intercessory Prayers of the church I served back then, that our nation would have a smooth transition of power and that our president elect would be safe from harm. The reason I added that prayer was because, you might remember, there were those who insinuated that he would never be sworn in, that

someone would put a bullet in his head, before this nation would be served by a black man.

I had a member of the church, a staunch Republican, come to me and say angrily, "Please stop praying for that man. He will never be my president." I replied with as much respect as I could muster, "He is your president even if you didn't vote for him, and I will continue to lead this church to pray for him because the chaos that would ensue if he is assassinated would rock the entire world." I should have quoted Paul; we pray for our leaders so that we may enjoy a "quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity."

Paul went on with his argument for starting everything with prayer and especially prayer for our leaders by writing:

³This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

I don't give a rip what so and so did to you that makes you so angry with them. Pray for them. And this I assure you will happen, something will change. You have probably all heard the bumper sticker theology, "Prayer changes things." I am here to tell you it does.

So pray all the time and pray for everything and everyone, especially those you don't appreciate and I promise you, your prayers will change things. But be careful. Your prayers might change you. You might be the problem. And why would you heed Paul's urgent admonition? So that you will lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. It is God's blessing for you.

Prayer

To conclude with prayer, I would like to read a prayer to you that I found in this new book I have entitled the "Jewish New Testament Commentary." It is a prayer written by the Central Conference of American Rabbis for their people and the people of their ancestral homeland, Israel. Why would I read this prayer to you? Because Israel and the Jews are a place and people who rarely know peace, and

because it is an example of what I have been preaching about. Listen and pray along with me and these Jewish rabbis.

Let us pray,

Grant us peace, Thy most precious gift, O Thou eternal source of peace, and enable Israel to be its messenger unto the peoples of the earth. Bless our country that it may ever be a stronghold of peace, and its advocate in the council of nations. May contentment reign within its borders, and health and happiness within its homes. Strengthen the bonds of friendship and fellowship among all the inhabitants of our land. Plant virtue in every soul, and may the love of Thy name hallow every home and every heart. Praised be Thou, O Lord, Giver of Peace. Amen.

May you have the quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. Amen