

Rev. Danny Mackey  
Easter 6 (Rogate)  
May 6, 2018  
1 Timothy 2:1-6  
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

He is risen! [He is risen, indeed!] Alleluia!

*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people.*

On that terrible day years ago, when two planes had crashed into the World Trade Center, the students and faculty at Concordia Theological Seminary were wondering what to do. Should we cancel classes? Should we call our spouses and parents? What should we do? President Wenthe joined us in the Commons and gave us the direction we needed. He told us, “Go to Chapel. Hear God’s Word. Pray.”

Prayer is one of the most powerful means at the Christian’s disposal. But we’re not just talking about any type of prayer. We’re talking about *the* prayers, as Saint Paul tells the young pastor, Timothy. Prayer must be intimately connected to God’s Word. It must be shaped and molded by the very words that God gives to us. Prayer must be prayed in faith. And not just some empty faith in the empty lies of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh—as is the case with all vain religions and philosophies. Prayer is true prayer when it is prayed to the Father through faith in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Anything less is a sham prayer, lip service, empty nothings, a waste of time and energy.

God makes no promise to hear sham prayers. Our heavenly Father only promises to hear those prayers prayed in Jesus’ name. It’s only for the sake of Jesus and what He has accomplished with the cross and empty tomb that the Father bends His ear to our cries for mercy. And so, those who are unbelieving have no confidence that the Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth and all therein, will hear them. Thus Apostle Paul directs the saints of God—Paul directs young Timothy and his congregation, Paul directs me and you, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Indiana to pray for those who are incapable of praying for themselves: “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people.”

Thus we prayed that dark Tuesday for those trapped in the crumbling towers. We prayed for those who sped their way to give assistance. We prayed for those mourning the deaths of loved ones on the planes. We prayed for those in authority: our president and

Congress and military. We prayed for those who orchestrated and committed such an atrocity. We prayed for those celebrating the deaths of thousands. We prayed to our God and Father, through Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, to have mercy on us and on all the world.

The first people Paul instructs us to pray for are those God has placed above us in authority. Paul is telling Timothy and his congregation to pray for Caesar and the occupying army of Rome. Timothy is to pray for the puppet governors. Timothy is to pray for those who would mock and ridicule the earliest Christians. Why pray for the government, especially a government of unbelieving pagans? Paul answers, "That we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way." We pray for them that they may allow us to confess and to worship as we believe God directs. We pray that they may preserve us from war and bloodshed. We pray that they commend the righteous and punish the wicked. Why? For the sake of the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And for the sake of the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul tells us to pray for, to make intercession for, and to give thanks for all people. All people—not just some people and not just for those who believe as we do and not just for those we like and care for. All people—for Jesus died and rose for all. God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." That is why the Father sent His Son to be born of a virgin, to suffer under Pontius Pilate, to be crucified, die, and be buried. The Father has done this for you—and He has done it for every single person who has ever and will ever live in this world. Since they cannot pray for themselves, we are to pray for them that they might also come to the faith in Jesus and receive God's overflowing and abundant mercy. "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior."

By praying for others we imitate our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. James writes in his epistle, "And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (Jas 5:15-16). Most certainly, prayer connected to and combined with God's Word has the power to save souls, to win others for Jesus, to bring people out of darkness and into the marvelous light of Christ.

I'm reminded of the story of a dear Christian woman named Monica. She had been married to an unbelieving man and they had a child. The boy, though Monica tried to raise him in the Christian faith, followed his father into unbelief. He went off to college. He met a girl, whom he got pregnant. They had a child out of wedlock. Later this boy joined a cult. As if that wasn't bad enough, he became a lawyer. Monica went to church nearly every day for thirty years, praying for her wayward and erring son. God answered her prayers in a pastor named Ambrose. Ambrose impressed the young lawyer with his profound insight and eloquent speech. That son, after being prayed for thirty years, came to the faith in Jesus Christ. His name was Augustine—Saint Augustine, one of the greatest and most profound theologians of all Christendom. Most certainly, “the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

Monica interceded before the Father for the sake of her son, Augustine. In this way she followed Christ's example. Likewise, one of the most powerful ways we can follow Jesus and serve our neighbor is with prayer. We can always pray—as long as we can think. We are never too young or too old to pray. No one can stop us from praying to our Father who art in heaven. In fact, we pray for those who would prevent us from praying. If we want to learn how to pray, we simply read and mark and inwardly digest God's Word. God's Word alone forms and informs our prayer. And God's Word is powerful. It created heaven and earth. Therefore, our prayers are also powerful.

It's important to remember that prayer is powerful because it's grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul says, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and humanity because He gave Himself as a ransom for all, which we now confess with the proclamation of the Gospel to all. The night before He paid the ransom for all on the cross, Jesus Himself prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed what we call His High Priestly Prayer, recorded for us in John's Gospel account, chapter 17. Jesus prayed for all who believe in Him and for all who would come to believe in Him; Jesus prayed for His disciples and for you.

Hebrews chapter 7 tells us that Jesus continues to mediate between the heavenly Father and us. “[Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (v25). Yes, Jesus continues to pray for

us. His prayer is “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Because Jesus has paid the price for our ransom with His blood shed, the Father answers Jesus’ prayer, pouring out His mercy on all people.

The Father hears the prayers of His saints and answers them. He hallows His name with the preaching of His Word to His glory and for the salvation of men. He causes His kingdom come by sending His Holy Spirit to lead us in all righteousness. His will is done, hindering every evil plan of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh and strengthening us with His means of grace. God gives rain to the just and the unjust alike, providing daily bread. For the sake of Jesus’ death and resurrection, the heavenly Father looks past our sins and gives us strength to look past the sins of others. He guards and keeps us from false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice, preserving us for the victorious gift of eternal life. And, in Christ Jesus, our Father in heaven rescues us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, gives us a blessed end, and graciously takes us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.

In Jesus, we are confident and bold in our prayer, knowing that our heavenly Father hears and answers us. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we pray not just for ourselves, but for all people, for God “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” in Christ Jesus. Thus we pray for the salvation of all people, trusting that just as we have been granted the gift of faith, the Holy Spirit will work faith in others. Therefore, as we continue through this life, the Holy Spirit works in us; and He directs us with these simple words, “Go to Church. Hear God’s Word. Pray.” Here in the Church, you find the Christ who saves you. His Word shapes you. And we pray to our heavenly Father to keep us in the faith and to bring all people into His kingdom of grace.

In Jesus’ name.

He is risen! [He is risen, indeed!] Alleluia!