

Message: *May the Kin-dom Reign in Our Hearts*

May God's Grace and peace be with you this day! Have you ever been in a group and someone asks, 'Whose gonna pray?' Or maybe you have a tradition that a certain person offers the grace before meals? What if you are the one asked to pray... how does that sit with you?

One of the words of wisdom given to me as I shared my response to ordained ministry is this... 'be ready to pray'. As the pastor, you will always be asked to offer a prayer.' My pastor was right... that's just how it is... what is expected. And honestly, it is an honor and a privilege to pray at someone's request. To pray is an opportunity to let the Kin-dom of God reign in my heart and in those with whom and for whom I pray.

Integral to the invitation to pray is the understanding of prayer... what it is and what is its purpose. At its simplest, prayer is communication and connection. Prayer is directed to another and offers praise, adoration, confession, requests, and or pleas for ourselves and for others. Prayer may be spoken aloud, chanted, sung, or unspoken. In our liturgy, we often are called to lift prayer or lift our hearts (p9) to the Lord.

During a bible study, one person responded to the question, 'what is prayer?' with 'prayer is the key to heaven'. So that is it: prayer is the basis of relationship with the source of all creation. We are made aware of prayer as significant in Jesus' personal practice of setting himself apart to pray. We know that the disciples requested Jesus to teach them to pray. The apostle Paul, also, implores us to pray always (1 Thess 5:17). In 2 Thess 1:11-12, Paul writes to the church with passion and love, that the people would follow God's will with their hearts and lives.

In our reading today from the First letter of Paul to Timothy, we hear the instruction to pray... and to pray for everyone, for all people, particularly those in authority. In the gospel reading, Jesus tells his disciples a parable about the household manager wasting the estate of a rich man.

When reading any scripture, it is important to understand the general context or situation that this letter is written in and to whom it is written, and to understand the issues of the day that may be influencing the writer and the purpose behind the writing.

So let's begin with the first reading: the two letters to Timothy, along with the letter to Titus are distinct writings in the New Testament. Known as the Pastoral letters, these letters are addressed to key associates (pastors) of Paul. They form a guide to organizing Christian communities and what is essential in worshipping, leading, & teaching households of faith, in confronting challenges brought by rival teachers, as well as setting forth standards holy living.

What is important to remember is not whether Paul or a disciple of Paul penned these letters, ... what's important is that these letters 'demonstrate a commitment to perpetuating Paul's ministry & teaching' (NIB One Volume Commentary, 699) and seek to

adapt the Pauline tradition into serving & equipping churches facing new challenges and opportunities.

So in the ancient Greco-Roman period or Paul's time and thereafter, households were the primary social and economic units. So we'll hear the language of 'the household of God' (3:15). Further, godliness implies loyalty to God and God's purposes. By living this kin-dom lifestyle, God will bring salvation to all as members of God's kin-dom. We must share God's kin-dom.

In the gospel text, the audience shifts away from the Pharisees to the disciples. Our reading last week focused on God's nature to seek and save the lost, left out, and the abandoned in parables of the lost sheep, lost coin & lost child. All are welcome to God's kin-dom, even the Pharisees. Now chapter 16 presents teachings on wise use of material resources, and single minded focus on God's ways.

With this in mind, let me ask a few questions: Why is there instruction to pray for all... including prayers for the governing authorities? What does Jesus mean in this parable of the dishonest manager? What does this mean for our living in God's kin-dom?

I believe these scriptures provide a great deal of wisdom and guidance in our daily lives and walk in God's kin-dom. These texts work together to lead us to connection with God, through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, so that our hearts and lives are aligned, are ruled, are in right relationship with God and God's ways.

We are to pray for all people: no matter who they are, where they come from, what they look like, or how they behave, because we are all of God... created and a part of God's creation. We are to pray for wisdom... for ourselves, and particularly for those who have authority... so that we can live in peace/quiet...in godliness & dignity.

Keeping in mind how God's kin-dom operates differently than the material world, perhaps we can understand this as 'freedom and justice for all'. Perhaps we can see the need to keep governing authorities and those who would be governing in prayer for living and leading in God's way. Perhaps we can see the need for keeping our eyes wide open to the needs around us and how we can be a part of making God's kin-dom more real on earth.

Finally, how might we live with a single-minded focus and passion for living faithfully in God's kin-dom, such as the dishonest manager did to preserve his life when unemployed? It is not about laying aside treasures for living... but about living as one who shares so others may have life.

Let us pray: O God, creator of us all, we thank you for who you are. We do not fully understand, but desire to know you and draw closer to you each day. We thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ, sent to walk with us as light and life in your Kin-dom. Through Jesus, we know you, who you are, and that we are your children. We thank you for the gift of Holy Spirit, given as divine presence within us. Lead us and guide us with the fire of your Love. O God, May your kin-dom reign in our hearts, this day and every day. Amen.