

I Timothy 2:1-7
Jeremiah 8,
September 19, 2010

Pray For Everyone

My Parents taught their three children the rather well known prayer:

Now I lay me down to sleep

I pray the Lord My Soul to Keep

If I should die before I wake I Pray the Lord my Soul to take.

We said this prayer each night before bed. This was obviously one of my first experiences with faith. I however, decided not to teach this prayer to my young children. It seemed to me that this was a prayer not all that age appropriate, in that it invited children to ponder the possibility of their death every night before I wanted them to calm down and hit the hay. Secondly the prayer presents a model of theology that is not entirely consistent with my own. I met with a member this week who used the term "fire insurance" theology. Fire insurance theology attempts to teach us to follow God so we can avoid hell and is therefore based in and on fear instead - of the fact that God is Love.

In any case, parents sometimes teach their children to end that prayer, not with an amen right away, but with prayers of intercession for friends and family. And some parents teach their children to pray for others. And some broad hearted loving children always find time and space in their generous spirits to add at the end of their list, "and God bless everyone." In fact I have seen that very scene acted out in several movie and TV episodes. God Bless Mommy and Daddy and God Bless Everyone. What at first might seem like a child like and childish exuberance. God bless everyone. Is exactly the Advice we get from the author of the book of Timothy in the New Testament.

"First of all, then, I urge that supplication, Prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for everyone." We perhaps hear our selves mumbling, Oh for Pete sake what bleeding heart liberal, politically correct mamby pamby hippie wrote those words - and then we realize they are from the Bible. Imagine for a minute the immensity, the depth, the broadness of this little snippet of scripture. We are exhorted to pray with the gentle lavishness of children and spread it around everywhere. Not only are we supposed to pray for our kings and in our case our elected leaders; But we are called literally to pray for everyone.

We are called by this Epistle to imagine a generous powerful and wonderful God who has arms wide open to receive our prayers for all people. This is not just a God reserved for me or for us; this safe God upon whose shoulder we cry on each Sunday, actually cares for everyone. We are called by this Epistle to imagine a generous astonishing Almighty who might even accept the prayers of our rivals, our enemies and those who are very much different from us. At times scripture and the light it casts upon God can be very annoying. There are lots of people and groups of people for whom, we are not enthused to pray.

The God of grace whom we have read about in scripture is said to be immortal, invisible, and unique. This God of power and might has also made that grace available for the sake of all humanity in Jesus. The Epistle of Timothy calls it mediation. This Jesus became human so that we might, in solidarity with him, participate in God's divinity. God has this amazing benevolent concern for all tribes and nations of people, all colors and shapes, all intellects and personalities and for them all, we are encouraged to pray. This is not the only teaching on prayer in scripture, but it certainly informs our acts of prayer.

The Passage from the book of Jeremiah for instance raises the question, is there no Balm in Gilead? In this case Jeremiah raises a prayer not quite for everyone but for his nation. Israel at the time had been invaded by Assyria, the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed and many citizens had ceased to pray to God and had set up altars to the Assyrian gods. Jeremiah's prayer is for healing and restoration. Jeremiah's prayer here is for cleansing and a return to faith.

Jeremiah's prayer here is a lamentation. A lamentation is a prayer whose theme is – O God won't things ever get better, or God won't this pain ever go away, Or God won't you fix this ache in my heart? There are many lamentations in the Bible. It's obviously OK for us to pray about our situation. It's obviously Ok for us to pray about our country or our religion or our own personal ache - it's just that the letter to Timothy urges us to cast a wider net, to pray with a more global perspective

A lot of what we learn about prayer comes from what our mothers and fathers in faith teach us. Some religions and some Christian denominations have certain language and or worship patterns that let you know exactly the room or outlook from which you

are praying. In the Orthodox church for instance, only the Priest can stand on certain sections what they call the altar. Only the Priest is pure enough to offer prayers to God. That is why he was ordained. In some African American churches the congregation prays during the sermon, they get into a cadence and pattern with the preacher and they shout amens and other encouraging words. In some Monasteries, monks and nuns gather for worship and prayer as many as seven times a day and they used a prescribed liturgy. In the Islamic faith, all people stop what they are doing, get down on their knees and pray to God five times a day. I learned at the Mosque a few weeks back that they wash their hands and feet and faces before they pray and they touch their faces to the ground to show God they have respect. A lot of Presbyterian Churches have well crafted and well planned prayers that are “wordsmithed” and thoughtfully offered during worship and or at home. Hopefully all of us are teaching our children that there are many ways to pray.

I thought I would take a moment this morning to reflect upon two prayer practices of our church and to encourage us all to consider why we do what we do. One practice is public and shared in

worship. The second is personal and public and shared by e-mail and at home.

The Prayer request and praise sheet sits on this handcrafted table just outside the entrance of our sanctuary. We therefore, all of us, pass the sheet before we come to worship. The Request pad is not there so that we can ask public support of our kid's soccer team or for prayers for the Redskins, Raven Orioles or Nationals - although God knows the Orioles and the Nationals seem to need prayer. The prayer request sheet is there so that we pray for everyone, in worship. Please next week avoid the smart "alacky" temptation to write "Everyone" on the pad next week as we will be shaking up the liturgy and Pastor Michelle will be offering the morning prayer and she will be returning from a week of education leave on Saturday. The prayer request sheet is there so we can publicly share our prayer requests, so we can unburden our hearts, so we can ask for the support of our fellow members – for situations of which we are aware.

We do a pretty good job of asking for prayers for our relatives and friends; but over the years I have noticed and so have some others - that we usually do not cast our nets too wide and mention many specific non local, non family concerns. I will tell you my bias

about the prayer request sheet. I see that sheet as your job as a congregation. I write a lot of words and lot of prayers every week for this church; but the sheet is your opportunity to shape worship and prayers here at Ark and Dove. This may annoy you, but even though you told me on Tuesday that your aunt Tilly has a very painful gout; if you are in church on Sunday, and you want to hear Aunt Tilly's name raised in public, then you should remember Aunt Tilly. I really don't particularly see it as my job. Likewise if you are concerned about the floods in Guatemala and Pakistan or the war in Somalia; you should take the ten seconds to jot it down. The prayer request sheet is our way of working together as a team in prayer. And we are called by God to Pray for everyone.

Secondly, I want to remind you or inform you that we have a prayer ministry in this church called Prayer Partners. When people have prayer concerns or situations in the family or world about which they are concerned they can request the pastors or the Moderator of Deacons to share that prayer concern with the prayer Partners. The Prayer partners then receive an e-mail about twice a week with our collective prayer concerns. Prayer Partners are members and friends of the church who have covenanted, who have promised to share

these prayer concerns during their private devotions and prayer times. Life being what it is, I usually pause for two minutes right after I read my Prayer Partners e-mail and remember the concerns to be sure I pray and then I also remember those concerns in the times I set aside in the week for prayer as well.

The faith behind the Prayer Partners and the Praise request and praise sheet is a faith that believes that God is not only immortal invisible and all powerful but a faith believes that God dwells in the souls of each person. There is some synchronicity, there is some catalyst like power, there is some loaves and fishes multiplication that occurs when we pray together in church and through prayer partners. There is a power we access when we pray together for everyone.