THANKSGIVING FOR ALL

1 Timothy 2:1-6
Thanksgiving
November 27, 2025
Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND
Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The epistle lesson comes from *Paul's First Letter to Timothy*, chapter 2, verses 1 through 6. Please stand as you are able for God's Holy Word. From 1 Timothy 2, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

> **1** First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be
> made for all people, **2** for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a
> peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. **3** This is good, and it is pleasing
> in the sight of God our Savior, **4** who desires all people to be saved and to come to the
> knowledge of the truth. **5** For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God
> and men, the man Christ Jesus, **6** who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the
> testimony given at the proper time.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.
You may be seated.
Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Give thanks to God for all things, and especially that Jesus is the mediator, between God and you, who gave himself as a ransom for you and for all. And pray for all people, especially those in high positions.

There are many reasons to give thanks. If you can think of any good thing, it is good and right to give thanks to God for it. James writes in his letter, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). If you ever find something to be good, you can be certain that it is from your Father in Heaven. Good does not happen by chance or accident. Nor does good ever originate in man. Only God is good, and all goodness comes from him (Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19). If it is good, it came from our Father, and everything that comes from him is good. Remember this at Thanksgiving. Acknowledge this at all times.

There is a covert temptation with Thanksgiving. The devil is very crafty, and he often disguises temptations in a form that looks good, even something as pious as Thanksgiving. We think of the many things we should be thankful for, and the temptation is that our eyes, mind, and heart would get stuck on those things instead of proceeding to give thanks to the giver. You may say tomorrow, "I am thankful for a family that loves me, a warm home, a free country where I can live peacefully and quietly, a feast of comfort food and sweets." You may even have abundance. What do you call it if we are thankful for all these good things, but we do not acknowledge God as the giver of them? That would be "idolatry." This is a very subtle temptation, and it is very near to us in the land of plenty. Our hearts may get stuck on the gifts instead of the giver. We may look to those things as our security or the things that will satisfy our desires. We may be like children on Christmas or their birthday when they open a new toy and never again make eye contact with the giver. We might spend the day thinking about all the good

things we have, and then spend the evening searching for and drooling over all the deals on the things we want. We might as well just call it "Coveting Day."

There is a better way. Identify those things for which you should give thanks, and follow through with giving thanks. When you express your thankfulness for something, do not simply say, "I am thankful for this, that, and the other thing." But say, "I thank God for this, that, and the other thing." Say, "I thank God, because all these things are unmerited gifts from him." Go ahead and identify those good things in your life, and then use them as a springboard to meditate on the goodness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If you want a good example of this, consider any of the hymns we are singing tonight.

Above all, give thanks to God for salvation. Lift your eyes above the temporary things of this world to the eternal world that awaits those who have been saved through Jesus Christ and given the knowledge of the truth.

Eternal salvation is the point of what Paul writes to Timothy. Back in chapter 1, Paul thanks God for saving him and appointing him as an apostle. He is especially thankful to God because of what he was before God intervened and showed him mercy. He was a blasphemer, persecutor, and opponent of Jesus (1:13). He emphatically says, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of who I am the foremost" (1:15). So when you give thanks, and especially when you give thanks for salvation in Jesus, remember your own unworthiness. Paul considered himself to be the worst of all sinners, because he persecuted Christ's Church. And there is something exceptional about the nature of his sin. There is no worse thing you can do than try to prevent people from worshipping the true God or hindering the proclamation of salvation. That puts the souls of other people in peril. But there is also a sense in which we should all feel the same way Paul did, even if we were not persecutors like he was. All sin is rebellion against the God of Heaven and earth. We were not good people, deserving salvation. We were lost, sinful, rebellious, and loving darkness. When we acknowledge this, it should glorify Christ in our minds. He saved us, not because we are good, but because he is good. And all the more, we should give thanks for the sacrifice of death he endured on the cross for our sake.

Paul had become a preacher of the Gospel. And he was writing to Timothy, who was also a preacher of that same Gospel. This is why he urges "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings ... for all people," especially for those in high positions (2:1-2). God desires for all people to be saved. Therefore, we should pray for all people.

We should give thanks for all people, because every person is a precious and eternal soul created by God. Even in spite of our universal sinfulness, each person also bears the image of God. And God works through people, even unbelievers, to accomplish his purposes on earth. They may be parents, grandparents, sons, daughters, teachers, farmers, nurses, drivers, etc. God does his work through ordinary people. This is how he cares for his creation. It is how he provides for the needs of our daily lives. So we should give thanks to God. We should thank him for all people.

We should especially pray for all people, that they would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Pray that the Word of God would spread unimpeded. Pray that God would send more laborers into the harvest of souls (Matt. 9:38; Luke 10:2). Pray that God would prepare the soil of their hearts, so that the seed of the Word would sprout, establish roots, and bear fruit of faith and love. Pray that God would save the lost.

Paul especially urges us to pray for "kings and all who are in high positions" (2:2). Why? Is it because their souls are more valuable than the rest of us? No. But it is the nature of their position that they can either impede the proclamation of salvation, or they can allow it the freedom to go forth. We should care about their souls as persons created in the image of God and loved by him. But also, because of their position, even if they remain unbelievers, we should pray for them, "that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way" (2:2).

"A peaceful and quiet life" does not mean that we just keep to ourselves. We could be tempted to misinterpret this passage to mean that we can just mind our own business and not proclaim Christ to the world. Being quiet about the Gospel is clearly not what Paul has in mind, because he is urging us to pray for all people, and he declares that God's desire is for "all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2:4). That does not happen without Christians, like you and me, opening our mouths to proclaim forgiveness in Jesus' Name. The benefit of a peaceful and quiet life is that there is room for the Gospel to be heard. And to this end, we should pray for those in high positions, that their governance would permit the unhindered proclamation of Christ crucified for the world. This is the purpose, or one of the purposes, for which God ordained government. Good government does not need to be Christian, but it allows us to be Christian, and it allows us to publicly testify of the eternal hope we have in Jesus Christ. Wherever this exists, we should thank God for it. And wherever it does not exist, we should still thank God for whatever good that government accomplishes. And we should especially thank God that nothing can take away the blessed hope we have in Jesus Christ.

I heard another Christian say, regarding a government official at the time, "I just can't pray for that man." That troubled me. She went on to explain that she thought the man was just so evil that she could not pray for him. So I said, "If you think he's that evil, you should pray for him. He probably needs it more than others." But she said, "No," and I became concerned for her.

We pray for people, not because they are worthy of God's help, but because they need it. The more evil you think a person is, the more you should pray for him. If we cannot bring ourselves to pray for a person, that is self-righteousness. It's thinking that another person, who is created in the image of God, is unworthy of our prayers. We should pray for all people, and especially those in high positions. I don't need to tell you that we live in a contentious political environment. Some of that is just a show for the cameras. A lot of it is self-righteousness. We like to think the other side is wrong in such a profoundly ignorant way that we must be very intelligent. And we like to think they are so evil and corrupt, that we must be the moral ones. Can we have an honest debate over ideas? Certainly. We should. Some ideas are better than others, but when we start thinking other people are worse than us, that is self-righteousness.

It's discouraging that we seem to want the other side to fail. It seems that whenever the "other side" is in power, we kind of want the economy to fail, just enough so that we can complain. Or we get kind of excited whenever there is a rumor of a scandal, and we want that evil thing to be true, because it will hurt the other side. Whenever we hear a rumor of some evil, we should want it to not be true, because we're against evil.

So whether you voted for a person or not, whether you like a person or not, pray for them. And pray for their success, that they would do well in the office they hold. You may dislike them. You may think their ideas are wrong. But you can still pray that whatever they do would bring about some good, whether it be prosperity, justice, peace, or any other good thing. Paul wrote this while Nero was the Emperor of Rome. And it was in the later part of his reign, when

he became especially tyrannical. If he could pray for Nero and instruct other Christians to do the same, then we too can pray for "all who are in high positions."

The ultimate purpose is that people will be saved. This is the will of God, "who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." "All" really does mean "all." There is no person beyond the grace of Christ. Not you, not anyone. To think, *I cannot be saved,* or, *that person will never be saved*, is to make too little of Jesus' sacrifice. Is the blood of Jesus enough? The answer is "Yes," before we even ask, "For what?"

The question we might ask regarding verse 4 is, "If God desires all people to be saved, why aren't they?" There are good answers and bad answers. When we try to reason this through, we can fall into a ditch on either side. We might start with God's power and say, "God's will never fails. Therefore, if anyone is lost, it is because God did not will to save them." Or we might start with his desire to save all and say, "God wants to save all people, but he leaves it up to man." Both are wrong. The first is to place both salvation and condemnation in God's hands. The second places both in the hands of man. But these should be two different questions. If I trust in Jesus and am saved for eternity, who is responsible for that? God is, 100%. And if I disbelieve and am lost for eternity, who is responsible for that? I am, 100%. We keep these as separate questions.

Or we might ask, "What about those who have never heard? Is it really their fault if they are lost?" We are all by nature sinful and unclean. No one deserves to be saved. All are accountable to God (Rom. 3:19). There is no injustice in God, but there is injustice in the heart of every man. We like to think it is unfair for some to be saved and others lost, because that would mean that there is some virtue or justice in the heart of man that makes us worthy of salvation. But there is none. Whenever we consider the lost, we should remember that we, also, do not deserve salvation, but God has saved us in his mercy, and he "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." The only cause of salvation is his love.

This may not completely satisfy our curiosity. We may not find an answer that gives us peace. And maybe that's the point. God does not want us to be okay with other people being lost. Whenever we consider this question, we should be moved to pray for the lost, and we should feel the compulsion to proclaim God's forgiveness to them. Then we should follow through on that. This is often the answer Scripture gives us. Are you concerned that some are lost? Pray for them, and go to them (e.g., Rom. 10:13-17).

We should never think that God does not wish to save someone. No one is beyond his mercy. And God was not content to sit back and allow people, even unworthy sinners, to be lost. "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (2:5-6). Whenever you consider another person, you should think, *That is a precious soul, who is created in the image of God, and whom Jesus gave his life to ransom from sin and death*. And whenever we think of ourselves, we should think, *I am a precious soul, who is created in the image of God, and Jesus gave his life to ransom me from sin and death*. Every human soul is precious. Why? Not because of anything we have done, but only because of what God has done. He created each person, and Jesus has paid the ransom for all people.

So we give thanks to God for every good thing. And we pray for all people:

Lord God, heavenly Father, every good and perfect gift comes from you. So we thank you for creating us. We thank you for preserving our bodies and providing for all of our physical needs.

We thank you for freedom in this land, and we ask that you would provide all people with the same gifts. We thank you for our authorities. Give them wisdom to govern justly, and reward them for their service.

The greatest gift you have given is your own Son, who became our Savior by offering his life as a ransom for sin. Forgive our many sins for Jesus' sake. Make us to share in his resurrection, so that we will live forever in the new creation.

You have sent your Holy Spirit to generate and preserve faith in our hearts. Thank you, because we could not do this ourselves. We pray that all around this world, and especially in our communities, the Gospel of Jesus would be spoken and that the Holy Spirit would attend to that Word and cause it to bear fruit. Bring many more people into your Church, and preserve your Church on earth, so that we will come to the eternal joys you have prepared for us, through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.