

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Sixth Sunday of Easter
1 Timothy 2:1-6
May 5th, 2013

A few days ago I was reading a sermon written when I was seven years old. It described everything that was wrong with the world back in the 1970s. The pastor wrote how in the past twenty five years there had been an accelerating rush toward total moral, social, ethical, and political chaos. The sermon goes on to say that western civilization is on the brink of total decay and will disappear as we know it in a matter of years.

We know that the moral, social, ethical and political are decaying. The rate of speed of that decay is in question, but the direction in which it is headed is not. I could stand up here at tell you what continues to be wrong with this world. I have done that sort of thing before. You have heard this... and... unless you live under a rock, you know.

But perhaps your mind and heart is heavy because of other things. You might not like what's going on in our world, but you have other things to worry about. You worry about your children. You worry about your parents. You worry about your job, mortgage, and finances. You worry about your health – your family's health – your friend's health. You might be thinking, "All that's going on in this world is of great concern to me. But, I have more important and personal matters to worry about first."

And so you do. You worry about kids, family and friends – and even what kind of world they are all living in. You worry about raising a generation in a world that is getting further and further away from knowing that there is such a thing as definite truth. As St. Paul writes to young Pastor Timothy in the Epistle reading we just heard today, he expresses concern for the generations to come – for this family and friends in the faith – as well.

Paul says to Timothy, a pastor, what to teach the church – "*I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people – kings and authorities...*" "Timothy," says Paul, "pray for the church... even for those outside of the church. Pray for those under authority and those in authority. Pray for all... the world desperately needs it." The reason Paul would give is in verse four when he says that Jesus, "*desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...*"

So, we pray. We pray that God's Word would have free course. We pray for those in authority. And we pray in the face of current conditions that our world encounters each and every day.

What does it mean for God's Word to have "free course"? Well, it means that we pray that God's Word is not met with great resistance. Think of the time that Paul wrote to Pastor Timothy. This letter came after Paul made three missionary journeys. While Paul's persecutions are well known – he was in jail in Philippi and in Rome – he was free to move about the world by land and by sea. Being a Roman citizen helped him in this regard. The free course of the Word of God helped the church to grow as Paul moved from church to church encouraging them to stay true to the Word.

Danger comes when the world stifles the free course of the Gospel. When the Word of God can be proclaimed the Holy Spirit works to change the hearts of men. When government regulation makes this opportunity difficult or even illegal, the free course of the Gospel is compromised.

We see this sort of thing in the world today and we see in those places a struggling Christian Church. We see people going to jail or suffering and dying for their faith. The faith continues even so the Gospel when persecutions abound. But having a free course of the Gospel is, of course, the most ideal. Pray for the opportunity to share the Gospel. It's God's gift to you.

With that in mind, pray for those in authority. Pray they know and understand how important our freedom to serve and to be served in the one true faith really is. Pray that our leaders, whether we agree with them or disagree with them, will be given the wisdom to make good, right and salutary decisions for our country, for our families, for the well-being of citizens of this place. Remember your country, its leaders, its military, and its law enforcement agents in your prayers. They have many decisions to make and many actions to take that could affect so many of us.

And pray in the face of the current conditions of this world. Morality is escaping from the hearts of the people. We are more concerned with people's rights, rather than doing, saying, acting, and passing laws that do the right thing. Instead of asking whether or not I "should" do it we ask "could" I do it and get away with it. Our country has blazed a moralistic path of least resistance... do whatever feels right or benefits you the most... rather than stepping back and seeing how an action might affect a person's relationship with others, their child (born or unborn), or their Lord. Our leaders have gotten caught up in personal rights and entitlements rather than doing what is right. We have gotten caught up in the path of personal rights over doing what is right. It's easy to do. The more I can get away with, the better off I am – no matter who it hurts or how many lies I have to tell.

So pray like Paul told Pastor Timothy to pray. *"Make prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for all people."* Pray in thanksgiving to God for those you pray for – even when they betray you. Remember Jesus on the cross as the people were hurling one insult after the other at Jesus, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* "What do you mean, Jesus? Of course they know what they are doing. They know what they are saying is meant to tear down and hurt you further. They know their words are not meant to build you up while you are bleeding and dying. What do you mean that they know not what they are doing?"

They know not that their sins are the reason Jesus is on the tree. They know not that Jesus dies for them. They know not that this is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. But you know, and I thank God that you know. That bleeding and dying is for you. In our prayers that come before our Lord we dare not forget to say "thank you" for your precious gift of life. May the grace you have given have free course in my life. May it have free course through me for the sake of my neighbor. May it be the life-blood for me in my greatest times of need as well as for others. As Christians we put our hope and faith in these words, *"He desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."*

The Lord desires not to lose one. So we pray for the free course of the Gospel. We pray for our leaders and the condition of this world.

In a chaotic world that continues to lack standards it used to possess, we know that God is still in charge of our days and our nights. God's church will remain in the face of any kind of persecution. The kingdom will endure forever. And that gives us hope. On Thursday we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord. Do come and join us. That Ascension is not Jesus leaving. Rather, it is Jesus fulfilling a promise – to send the Holy Spirit to work for the sake of the fallen world. We have a Jesus that is at work for you and this world with the forgiveness and life that comes from none other. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.