

January 15 Support Your Leaders

1 Timothy 2:1-4

Paul wrote a couple of letters to Timothy, a young man he had chosen to take over leadership of some of the early congregations Paul had planted. These letters of advice cover many issues. We can assume that either Timothy had asked some questions of Paul, or Paul, realizing that he might be executed by the Romans at any time, decided to impart some thoughts that he hoped would be helpful. The passage that we read this morning is part of a larger discourse on prayer. In it Paul says that prayers of intercession and thanksgiving should be offered for kings and all who are in high authority. These words are a powerful reminder to us at this moment in our nation's history. In a few short days whether you voted for him or not, Donald Trump will become our president. The peaceful transition of power is one of the hallmarks of our society. We are reminded to pray for him.

Upon hearing this you might think, but of course. You voted for him and are looking forward to the possible changes his administration will bring to our country. You have been offering prayers of thanksgiving since his election. Others of you want to share all the reasons you did not vote for him and why you are still angry and worried. Paul would tell you, pray for him anyway. Think about the people who received this letter. They were undergoing persecution. The government was something to be feared instead of trusted. Yet they were told to pray for those in authority, even those persecuting them, and to offer prayers of thanksgiving. Why? Paul realized that stability in leadership is good for those being governed. If things were stable it was more likely the Christians could lead a quiet and peaceable life.

We never know what a president's term of office will look like. All come into this high office on the basis of campaign promises and ideals that others have supported. Then the reality of life happens. Congress, even one where the party in control is the same as the elected president, has a tendency to do its own thing. World affairs, natural disasters, and more, all shape the future. It is always a journey into the unknown. We need to pray for those in authority that they find the wisdom to meet these challenges.

Paul would also remind us in other places that even though we are praying for those in authority this does not mean that we then accept everything they do and every edict they propose. We are called to be faithful to God. This is our first allegiance. The early Christians, even if they were praying for those in authority, did not just go along with the crowd. They resisted policies that they felt were in opposition to their values. Many paid the ultimate sacrifice for their resistance. We pray so we can live in peace and dignity and godliness. We pray for our leaders to allow our Christian values to flourish in our communities. Yet we also pray asking God to help us be faithful.

This is where things get challenging. Up until this point I believe we are all in basic agreement. As we have learned through this election, the values we believe God is calling us to support as people of faith will vary greatly depending upon whether you are a supporter of Donald Trump's policies or you supported one of the other people who were seeking election. We hold different values, ideals and understandings as to what it means to be a person of faith. I am sure that this was the case even in the early church. Everyone was probably in agreement that they were against policies that allowed government officials to arrest people and execute them solely on the basis of religion. Yet we know that other issues, such as whether or not they should go along with edicts concerning offering a pinch of incense to the emperor, brought about different opinions. So what do we do?

We need to hold on to our core values. What that means depends upon what filter we look through at life. We know that we are called to love others, even our enemies; we are to work for peace and we need to live in such a way that we share clearly that all people are of worth and beloved by God. If certain policies seem to go against these values, as we interpret them, we need to be willing to work to stop them or change them. As I have said, each of us will view things differently and we should embrace this diversity without feeling the need to come to a harmonious state. A robust democracy is one where people feel free to express their opinions, challenge what they perceive to be wrong and work to enact change. It is how we stay current and vital, but it is hard work.

We also need to try and do nothing that will bring another down. Put downs, belittling others or attacking is never all right. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, would say, "Do no harm." Again, we struggle because what some would see as harming others would be seen by a different group as being cautious or protective of all. Here is just one example of many in the current stew of ideas going around. Are laws requiring the registry of all Muslim an attack on our core values of religious freedom or a thoughtful way of dealing with the current terrorist threat? Using the lens of "do no harm" could cause you to support or reject such an idea.

When we disagree we need to work for what we believe in while respecting others right to disagree with us. That is so difficult because on some issues we believe things with such a great passion that we feel that people who disagree with us are just plain wrong! To listen with respect is hard. To work for what we want might mean facing opposition and hatred. Just because we strive to be respectful doesn't mean the other side will necessarily offer us the same level of respect. Jesus understood this and that is why he said, "When someone strikes you on the left cheek offer them the right one too." He didn't say, be nice until they are not nice and then let them have it. Love and respect in challenging times is very hard.

Finally, we are called to pray for all. We need to continually pray for our leaders, for those who disagree with us and challenge us. We need to see the good in them and not focus on the differences.

As a student of history I am reminded that we, as a country, have decided that the ballot box instead of the bullet is the way to bring in change. We may or may not like the Electoral College. Some hate it because their candidate won the popular vote but lost the election. Others love it because it allows their candidate to become president. Like it or hate it we have decided to ultimately make decisions about the president using this system. The people, through this policy, have voted for change, major sweeping change. Some are celebrating; some are fearful and angry, most, I am thinking, are cautious. We need to support the process and what has happened even if we are not pleased with the outcome. We are to pray for our leadership in the years to come,

hoping they will have the wisdom to enact policies that make us safer and the world a more peaceful place.

Remember God is ultimately in charge. We move into the future knowing God holds the future. We all would like to know what the next four years will bring. All we can say is that we give thanks to God who loves us and challenges us to love others. We pray for soon to be President Trump and pray that we may lead a peaceable life in all godliness and dignity under his administration.