

"First of All" Rev. Jane Courtright 1 Timothy 2:1-7 9/22/19

When someone says, "**First of all,**"
it's pretty safe to assume
that what they say after that is something **important:**
First of all, eat a good breakfast.....

First of all, do your homework before you play....
First of all, read the instructions...
First of all, count to 10....

Or as one of my group leaders at Clergy Clinic used to say
as he coached us on how to approach conflict,
"First of all, take your self-medication of choice....."

In this week's short Epistle reading, there is a '**First of all**' instruction:
"First of all, pray for everyone. **PRAY FOR LEADERS.**
Pray hard so that you can live peaceably & respectfully
as you focus on listening for God."

And then, the writer goes on to say,
"I am telling the truth, I am **NOT** lying!"
Like he **KNOWS** his words are hard to swallow.
And they do seem to be a bitter pill!

REALLY.....EVERYONE?!

Everyone is a lot of people, some of whom could hurt us,
Some of whom may even want to destroy our way of life.

REALLY....couldn't God be more discerning?

By including 'kings and queens & others in authority,'
it's clear that 'everyone' includes people powerful enough
to hurt us and those we love.

This inclusion addresses a thorny issue for those of Timothy's time
who lived in the Roman Empire.

Should a Christian pray for a political leader-
an emperor who claimed to be divine....a god?

Should or could the allies during WW II have prayed for Hitler?

What would people think if prayers
were offered in church for **Osama Bin laden?**

Imagine offering a prayer for **ICIS** next Sunday.

What **WOULD** people say at coffee time
or in the parking lot after church?

*Could you give thanks in prayer for all past presidents of our country?

*For our current President?

While I was teaching about this passage in a Sunday School class,
five year old Lily declared,

"I can't pray for President Obama –he's evil.....I hate him!"

COULD YOU PRAY FOR.....

*For drug dealers in our area?

***For CEOs of coal companies?**

*For Boko Haram (Har-ahm),
who kidnapped around 300 school girls in Nigeria
into bondage several years ago?

What would you say?

And if you **CAN'T** pray for all these people in church, **WHY NOT?!**

It's *curious* how religious people like to pray
when they **agree** with government leaders & their decisions.

When they **disagree**, they tend to *forget* this call to pray.

Even though as Fred Craddock, theologian, writes that,
"we should note that this passage only calls for prayers to be made
on behalf of ruling authorities & does not demand submission to them."

Or as Carl Holladay writes,

“Being prayerful for political leaders is one thing –
Being blindly submissive is another.”

Prayer doesn’t rule out sincere challenge to those in leadership,
or even working with those who have different beliefs than yours!

And sometimes, ‘everyone’

is even harder to swallow as it moves closer to home:
*the boss who fired you,
*the friend who dumped you,
*the lover you can see now, never really cared for you.
*the co-worker whose true, double-dealing colors
no one else seems to be able to see.....

And we’re not talking about a self-righteous last word:

“Well, I’ll pray **for YOU!**”

Like the time my pastor of an Assembly of God church

(when I was around 9 years old,)

said after an disagreement with my Dad,

“I will **SURELY** pray for **you.**”

A triumphant utterance which left my Dad

with bitterness and anger

toward the church as a whole!

We love to pray for people....with our own agendas.

We may dress up our prayers with non-agenda sounding words,
but when we pray for others, often we pray that they will,
in the end, see things **OUR WAY** which is, of course, God’s way, **RIGHT?**

We use words like.... *wisdom and power

*strength & knowledge of God’s love *discernment

*knowing God’s will *perseverance & patience

These **ARE** good things to pray for....
but what is the spirit in which we pray?
Does it come with our own agenda?

WHAT IF we simply prayed with an agenda of good will?
WHAT IF, when we prayed, we asked God's blessing for **EVERYONE?**

Do you remember when after '9/11'
(whose 18th anniversary was just noted)
There appeared on multitudes of automobiles & signs the prayer:
'GOD BLESS AMERICA.'
My response was to find a bumper sticker which read:
"GOD BLESS THE WORLD. NO EXCEPTIONS"
It was a bumper sticker that many said caused them to think!
I have carried it ever since!

How would you feel if I stood in this pulpit
and prayed for the Cubs to win a baseball game:
How about the Cardinals? The Brewers?
What if I prayed for the Eagle River Wolves to lose a championship?

While I was a pastor in Byron, IL., a mother, member of the church,
requested right before worship that I pray aloud for her daughter's
basketball team to win the championship game.
(students from more than one school district
attended that large church!)

When I responded by praying **not only** for her team,
but for others involved in the game as well,
the woman left church angry – never to return.

Her prayer request had a definite agenda!!

What if: when we pray for people, pray that they are blessed.
Truly wish them the best and let God set the agenda!
Pray. Be quiet and peaceable. Listen for God.

OK. But being Quiet and Peaceable?! What does that mean?

I don't believe that this week's letter demands
that we don't show up,
stand up, and speak up.

This quiet & peaceable life is NOT a life
in which we blend so well into the culture
that our lives threaten none of its values.

GOD'S VISION IS SO MUCH BIGGER THAN THAT!!!!

This passage does not support the beginning
of the '**GO ALONG TO GET ALONG**' kind of accommodation
that has confused the Christian church for centuries!

This passage doesn't encourage us to trade
speaking in truth for power
for living in peace and quiet.

In the Hebrew language, the QUIET, PEACEABLE life
described in 1 Timothy is translated SHALOM.

We don't pray for the powerful in order to have the kind of peace
that accommodation to, isolation from
or even just being left alone by them will accomplish....
as in the play 'Fiddler on the Roof', when the people ask:
'Rabbi, is there a proper blessing for the Czar?'
He thinks for a moment, then, comes up with the answer:
'May God bless and keep the Czar... far away from us!'

We pray so that our paths may cross with these people....
in a Spirit of wholeness & peace**SHALOM**.

If our prayers are sincere, and without agenda,
just maybe the distinction between **WE & THEY** can disappear.

No one is worthless or beyond God's care.
it isn't **MY GOD** against **YOUR GOD** (*whatever name you have for God*),
but our one God who values everyone!

The **GOD IS STILL SPEAKING**, ministry
alludes to this passage in the message
“That **EVERYONE** is welcome.....**EVERYONE**,
no matter who they are or where they are on life’s journey”....

As we look more closely at verse 3 of this short passage,
it turns out that there is another reason to pray for everyone:

“because God welcomes such prayer,
Because God desires everyone to be saved,
and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Eugene Peterson’s translation of these verses in **The Message**
begins with these words:
“The first thing I want you to do is pray.
If we pray in all things & in all times,
perhaps it won’t be so hard to get along with one another
and with our rulers and kings, as we make our way toward truth.”

We pray for everyone and God’s agenda comes true.
Why? How? That’s the question of the ages.
One thing is for sure:
It **WILL** happen with our prayers and our partnership with God!

WE SHALL OVERCOME SOMEDAY....SOMEDAY. AMEN.