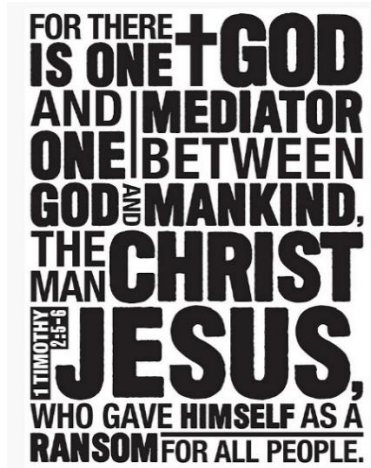


Sermon – September 18, 2022  
“A Ransom for All”  
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: 1 Timothy 2:1-7

*Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill us with open hearts, and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them a blessing for your people, transforming us into Christ's image, and guiding us to fruitful labor as we follow Jesus into his mission right here, right now. Amen*

Good morning! You all look great in those bright colors. Summer ends this week and while there may be some hot days ahead, already the nights are much cooler and our AC has been off for several days. Those beautiful fall colors cannot be far away and that first frost when the majority of those pesky summer bugs go away will be along soon. I can hardly wait.

This morning we are continuing our journey through the season of Kingdomtide with a focus on Paul's letters to Timothy. Timothy is in Ephesus where he has been struggling with false teachers. Paul writes to encourage Timothy and to give him advice for addressing false teaching. In the first chapter of this first letter, Paul reminds Timothy of Paul's own mission to the Gentiles, a mission Timothy is part of in Ephesus. Now in this second chapter of the letter, Paul turns to giving instructions as reminders to Timothy to ensure key parts of Paul's teaching are in place in the church in Ephesus. These are instructions that we will want to understand and put into practice in our own church.

Let me point out that in these seven verses of Paul's letter, five times we will find the word "all" in some form. The exact word will vary with your translation, but we should find, first of **all**, prayers for **all**, in **all** godliness and dignity, **all** to be saved and Jesus Christ a ransom for **all**. When we find this level of word repetition in scripture so close together, we should realize the author is trying to tell us something important that is connected to the repeated word. "All" points us to the universal impact of Paul's instruction, and it also may be Paul's response to false teaching in Ephesus that is presenting an exclusive teaching. In either case, we will want to understand the universal theme Paul is sharing and how it applies to what he is helping Timothy and us to understand with this emphasis.

The first instruction Paul shares is to "urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity"<sup>i</sup> I am sure that we all pray for those in leadership positions in our government, and, on a regular basis, I try to include prayer for our president and leaders in our intercessory prayers. Usually, my own prayers for leadership center around asking for wisdom for the leaders, that they may lead well, and that their decisions may honor and please God. Paul's idea of prayer for leadership is deeply rooted in the Exile experience of Israel. Let me read Jeremiah 29:7 to give us an idea. Jeremiah is writing to the exiles in Babylon and giving them instructions for life in exile. He says, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."<sup>ii</sup> Jeremiah is encouraging the exiles to live in the nation they are now part of and specifically tells them to pray to the LORD on its behalf. Just as Israel was in exile, taken out of the Promised Land, we also, while we are part of an inbreaking kingdom, the kingdom of God, live in the world in a nation and are to pray for the leaders of the nation in which we live.

What Paul is seeking through these prayers for the welfare of the nation is a quiet and peaceable life lived out in godliness and dignity. We are not to seek to find some remote, private place away from people to live where we can be separated from the world and focus on living a godly life. We are to pray that the leadership will so order their influence over the government

that we may be able to live in the world as witnesses through a radically different lifestyle to the lifestyle the world advocates. The radically different lifestyle is rooted in prayer that all may come to know the truth and be saved. Our prayers for our leaders should include prayer for them to come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and for that truth to be seen in their leadership. Living a quiet and peaceful life in the midst of those who actually disagree with our lifestyle and disagree with what we teach and the example of Christ we seek to follow may seem like a struggle, a struggle that seems to be growing as there are more clashes between our lives in Christ and the world's understanding of civil rights. We are still blessed to live in a country that is second to none in its understanding of religious freedom. Many of our brothers and sisters in Christ are not as fortunate and live in places where being a Christian is a death sentence. We need to shape our prayers to include their struggles, praying for their leaders to become open to Christ's love and lead their governments so that Christians can live peaceful godly lives.

We may have some idea of what it means to live a quiet and peaceful life in the world, but we need to spend a few minutes growing our understanding of living in godliness and dignity. The key is to be those who live a life that is rooted in prayer that all may come to know the truth and be saved. The phrase translated as "godliness and dignity" is often translated in English as "religion." Too often the idea of religion brings to mind conflicts within the church and sometimes with the world that give "religion" a bad name, as those conflicts are frequently inconsistent with a life that fully reflects living in the truth. The Greek expression that is translated to religion is also the Hebrew concept seen in the Old Testament as "fear of YHWH." We may be reminded of such statements in the Old Testament, for example, "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."<sup>iii</sup> It does not take a great deal of reading in the Old Testament before we find the "steadfast love of the LORD" connected to the "fear of the LORD." The idea of fear of the LORD, or religion, is the living out in our lives of the "essential interrelationship of the knowledge of God and corresponding conduct."<sup>iv</sup> In Acts 10:2 we find the expression "God fearers" describing Cornelius and his family, a Roman family that lives in the world while exhibiting service and worship of God. The idea is we are those who, by following Christ, grow in the knowledge of God as revealed in Christ and then conduct our lives in light of that knowledge. We might connect this idea to the word sanctification, the idea that after we accept Jesus as our savior (justification), we begin a process of growing into the image of Christ, seeking to learn more about Jesus and order our lives with the help of Holy Spirit to

live as Jesus lived. We are seeking to live in a manner that reflects the truth in the way we live and act in the world.

Christians too often view living a life that reflects the truth as living in the world by doing good and not bad things, frequently with the world's definition of good and bad. Paul has a different view of what the primary aspect of such a life is like. Paul has a singular focus to live in Jesus' mission in the place where he is found. Paul, at this point in the letter, does not go forward to direct Timothy to living a life that is free from sin and consistent with the truth. Instead, we should notice that at this point Paul immediately focuses on speaking to what God's will or desire is for the world, telling us that God, "desires everyone [all] to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."<sup>v</sup> Paul stresses that God is inclusive, desiring all to be saved. Paul also notes that this is not universal salvation, but it is salvation that comes from a person coming to the knowledge of the truth. Coming to knowledge of the truth is coming to belief in Jesus Christ. Coming to the truth requires action on the part of the person to accept Jesus' gift given on the cross. It is a gift given to all, but a gift that must be claimed by each person. Notice Paul also stresses that we have one mediator who is a ransom for all. God is inclusive, willing all to come to know the truth, but the mediator, Jesus Christ, is also one, the only mediator between God and humanity. Jesus is the way, the only way, to God. God is inclusive, but the way to God is only through Jesus Christ. Jesus is exclusive as the only mediator who paid the ransom with his life on the cross for us to be reconciled to God. Living a life that has more good than bad does not get us to heaven. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. He, and he alone, is the mediator between God and humanity.

Paul closes this first instruction to Timothy by noting that Paul's role is to share this Good News, to be one who is living out the knowledge he has been given about Jesus Christ among the Gentiles. Paul is not at work primarily among other Jews, but is at work sharing the Good News with the Gentiles, the "all" of the world. By implication, Paul is encouraging Timothy to also live out this aspect of the knowledge he has been given about Jesus Christ among the people of Ephesus. And by implication, Paul is encouraging us to also live out the knowledge we have been given about the truth in Christ right where we are, in this place. And as we seek to become those who are living out our lives in this manner, we too should be those who pray for salvation to come through us into the world around us and that our leaders would provide an environment through the government they lead in which we can live out our

knowledge and seek to be part of God's will for all to come to know the truth. We can begin our own entry into Jesus' mission by beginning to pray daily, asking God to bless our city, county, state, country, countries around us, and all of the world in a manner that allows us to share the Gospel in the places where we are and where we are sent by the Jesus through the leadership of Holy Spirit.

One of the questions that often surfaces when we begin to look at Paul's instructions is, "What happens to those who do not have a chance to hear the Gospel?" And yes, there are countries that are closed to the sharing of the Gospel, North Korea as example. And yes, there is a large area of the world known as the 10-40 window where there is currently little sharing of the Gospel. But our answer to this question is in part to realize that it is God's will that all be saved through coming to knowledge of the truth. This is Jesus' mission and we are currently planted in that mission right here in Burgess and Ophelia. We are to be those who are praying for the leaders of the government and are at work, joining Jesus in his mission in this place. We are to focus on sharing the Gospel where we are and leave Jesus' greater mission to Jesus. Our goal is to see the Good News shared with everyone with whom we have a relationship, or are led into a relationship with, and to be willing to walk with them until they come to know the Gospel of Christ.

Let me close by reminding us that Paul was encouraging Timothy to pray in this manner when Rome was already beginning to persecute Christians. And yes, many countries are closed to the sharing of the Gospel, and more are becoming closed as they exchange religious freedom for human-defined civil rights and disregard the truth of Christ. In our own country, there is a continued engagement in such discussions by our government leaders, yet we are to be those who are praying for our leadership from the federal level to our local church leadership here in this place, that we will be enabled to participate fully in God's will for all to be saved. We should be making God's will our focus and living lives that reflect the knowledge of Jesus we have received and at work with Jesus in his mission to all people in season and out of season.

*Pray with me: Father God, lead us to a deeper knowledge of the truth of Christ and, as we grow in knowledge of the truth, send Holy Spirit to lead us out into Jesus' mission to all people that we may walk with them until they come to know the truth. We ask in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

---

<sup>i</sup> NRSV 1 Timothy 2:1-2

<sup>ii</sup> NRSV Jeremiah 29:4-7

<sup>iii</sup> NRSV Proverbs 9:10

<sup>iv</sup> Towner, Philip H.. The Letters to Timothy and Titus (NEW INTERNATIONAL COMMENTARY ON THE NEW TESTAMENT). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Kindle Edition.

<sup>v</sup> NRSV 1 Timothy 2:4