

Nokesville UMC Sunday Worship
November 21, 2021
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Quietness and Peace in the Hectic Season
1 Timothy 2:1-3

(1)

Most cities in Europe and South America were established with squares as the center. In the center of the squares, churches (mostly Catholic churches) stand. When I traveled to Europe and South America, I used to spend hours to get to know more about the cities by going around and seeing every corner of the cities on foot. When I had no more strength to walk, I used to enter into a church no matter if it was big, famous, and extravagant or small, unknown, and shabby. Sitting in a pew, I looked around inside the church—stained glass, cross, pulpit, pipe organ, and others. And I closed my eyes and took deep breaths. At the moment, I came to completely forget the outside world of the church—the crowd, the noise, touts, yelling, and more, and to feel quietness and peace with the air of the old church. I just passed through the church entrance, but I felt I was in a completely different place at the same time.

Timothy, a pastor of the Ephesian church in today's passage, struggled with issues inside and outside the church. For him, the Apostle Paul sent a letter and advised him how to be quiet and peaceable. Through the passage today, let us find out his ways.

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According to the Lectionary schedule, we read 1 Timothy 2:1-3. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to his mission coworker Timothy in the mid 60s during his mission trip. At the time, the Roman emperor was Nero (reign: 54-68 AD), one of the cruelest Christian persecutors among Roman emperors. It is known that the Apostle Paul was beheaded, and Peter was crucified upside-down in Rome during Nero's reign. In this life-threatening situation, Timothy lead pastoral ministry at the church in Ephesus. Through his letter, Paul advised Timothy about issues in the Ephesian church such as false teachers, their teachings, and the aftermath. In the letter, Paul focused on the fact that true Christianity is shown in lifestyles shaped by the gospel. On the other hand, those whose lives are not shaped by the gospel have turned away from the faith. Today's passage is part of description of gospel-shaped life.

Verse one says, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone." Paul urged four valuable Christian virtues—supplication, prayer, intercession, and thanksgiving. This must be the fruit of the gospel-shaped life. First, supplication indicates an appeal for a particular need for himself/herself. For example, we can listen to Hannah's crying out to God saying, "O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child..." (1 Samuel 1:11). She supplicated to God so she could have a male baby.

Second, prayer is intended to be a conversation—a two-way dialogue with God. We remember Jesus's prayer at Gethsemane. Jesus talked with His Father saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want" (Matthew 26:39). This was a dialogue between God the Father and Jesus the Son even though the Father kept silent.

Third, intercession captures an urgent and bold request for others. Here is an example. After Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive God's laws, his return was delayed. The Israelites began to be anxious, so they asked Aaron to make a gold calf to soothe their anxiety and fear. And they did it. They formed the golden calf and proclaimed that this is the god who brought them up out of the land of Egypt. God became outraged and said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them..." (Exodus 32:9-10). Against God's outrage, Moses interceded for the Israelites, "Turn from

your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people” (Exodus 32:12). God eventually listened to Moses’s intercession and did not punish them.

Finally, thanksgiving denotes an expression of our gratitude. After Mary knew that she was conceived by the Holy Spirit and would bear a son—Jesus, the Son of the Most High—she gave thanks to God saying, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed...” (Luke 1:46-48). Likewise, all four virtues—supplication, prayer, intercession, and thanksgiving—are the ones that we Christians should practice.

But in today’s passage, the Apostle Paul did not focus on teaching the four virtues. Rather, he teaches us who and what we need to practice for.

(3)

Again, verse one says, “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone.” Here, it is understandable that we need to practice—we supplicate, pray, intercede, and give thanks—for others. Yes, we agree with and can practice them for others. But Paul might have assumed that Timothy, the Ephesian church, and all his readers—including us—could understand only half of his intention; so he added in verse two: “for kings, and all who are in high positions...” Paul urges Timothy and the Ephesian church to supplicate, pray for, intercede with, and give thanks for kings and all people in high positions. Who were the kings and those in high positions? They were Roman emperors, tetrarchs, governors, military officers, and Jewish religious authorities. They were the ones who crucified Jesus on the cross, who persecuted and killed Christians; who threaten their lives; and who will persecute and kill the Apostle Peter and Paul. Nevertheless, Paul urged Timothy and the Ephesian church to do so for them. Why?

See the second part of verse two: “so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity” (v. 2). The Apostle Paul clearly taught us that if we do supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving not only for everyone but also for those who persecute us or give us a hard time, we come to lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. Still hard to understand? Here is what Jesus taught with the same theme:

“You have heard that it is said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy’ (Leviticus 19:18). But I say to you, ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven...For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?... And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others?’” (Matthew 5:43-47).

If we have those who hate us or whom we hate in our minds and hearts, we can look fine but never be fine at all. Our hatred, anger, envy, and others that are subsided at the bottom of our minds and hearts in ordinary days will stir us up and be expressed in violent ways. We will never be quiet and peaceable with those thoughts and feelings. However, as Jesus said, “Love your enemies.” If we forgive them, and further pray for and bless them as a loving expression, our minds and hearts will be given quietness and peace.

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This week, we will enjoy the season of Thanksgiving. Families, friends, and loved ones will gather together and enjoy delicious meals. And all houses will be filled with chatter and laughter, and you may also enjoy shopping on Black Friday. I hope you will enjoy such a joyful time with others. But if we spend the season of Thanksgiving in this way alone, it will also give us tiredness, meaningless spending money, regret, and gaining weight.

But in this hectic season, I want you to have a quiet and peaceable time. Think of your broken relationships—with family members, with friends, with neighbors, and with others. Forgive them first, pray for, and bless them. By doing so, you come to fulfil Jesus’s teachings and come to have quietness and peace in your minds, hearts, souls, and spirits. In the season of Thanksgiving, I pray that you will be filled with joy by being with loved ones as well as filled with quietness and peace by forgiving, praying for, and blessing others who hate you and whom you hate. Amen.