**1 Timothy 2:1-4**

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.  This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,  who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

**“God At Work In The System”**

A blessed Thanksgiving to all as we gather in this house of God to give thanks to Him for all He has done for us. Amen. Even though not a Christian, George Washington was the first to proclaim a nation-wide thanksgiving celebration in America. He noted it, “as a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many (and signal) favours of Almighty God’".[[1]](#footnote-1) This man, like others still today, could value the blessings shining upon our land. The theme of “giving thanks” surrounds the traditions of so much travel, a fancy meal for the table, and celebrating with family and friends. People desire to give thanks and just for that, we can be thankful.

Tonight our thanks focuses like a laser beam upon God at work in the system. Israel was to remember this before entering the Promised Land for “…man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” Again, we note how Jesus, the Word become flesh, enters a village designed to quarantine Lepers and gives a miracle of healing by His Word. God is at work in the system and Christians celebrate such undeserved mercy. It is the request we make in The Lord’s Prayer saying, “Give us this day our daily bread.” It is what rests on the commandment of God that declares, “Honor your father and mother.” Gratitude goes beyond a day of thanks, but overflows every day from the good news of Jesus Christ.

Turn to hymn 844 and let us sing verses 1 & 2. St. Paul tells Timothy that prayer is one of the first fruits of love by us as Christians. He says, “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people.” Prayer is not merely a private matter, but is important part of public worship. Jesus prayed in the temple and together with His disciples. Many tomorrow will speak about the things and reasons for thankfulness. Christians turn to prayer for ourselves and others because the fullness of thankfulness finally falls on Jesus Christ. His mercy leads us to pray in a sinful world because the Father has sent us His Son.  
 Without Christ, generic thanks abound over jobs for people, food for the body, and safety for families. However, St. Paul shows that God is at work when Christians thankfully pray for all people. It is not merely for the successful or those on our side, but especially praying those who do evil and even our enemies. We know this to be a blessing because Jesus said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you…” (Matthew 5:44). The Savior on His cross display this perfectly for He prayed for us all saying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). All people have a part in a system be it family, country, or church. It is part of the “gives us this day our daily bread.” Yet, only Christ forgives sinners by His death no longer to live for self. Only He is risen up as salvation guaranteed for every person. All are part of the system and yet the greatest gift Christians have is thankfulness to pray for all in Jesus’ Name.

Turn now to hymn 751 and let us sing verses 1 & 3. The apostle Paul narrows his focus of prayers to be especially, “for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” What is shocking about these words is that there were no Christian rulers at that time. St. Paul lived when Emperor Nero was a ruthless man who brought great pain on those claiming Jesus as Lord and not him. Yet, prayer for those in high positions remains so that exercising authority might be for peace. It is pleasing to God to see His people have peaceful and quite lives before Him. In other words, we pray for our nation and its leaders whether executive, judicial, or legislative. They will never be perfect and why we pray for them. War and strife only hinder the Church’s work to bring good news into the systems that govern us.

The freedoms in this country give a unique place for church and state to work for common good. It means we pray for good leaders. Those who will lead by suffering, be honest to the situation, and stand firm in the law. If peace prospers, benefits abound for all, but especially for Christians. Luther explains, “The ungodly use peace for shameful wickedness. We use peace that we may more quietly be able to discuss the Word, extend the faith, and bring up our children in spiritual, corporal, and moral discipline… Let us be serious toward men and do nothing that offends but only what edifies” (Luther Works Vol. 28). Praying for those in high positions gets into the details of “giving us this day our daily bread.” It directs us to the fourth commandment where we honor parents and all in authority. Rather than being in a culture war, the Church freely seeks the work of Jesus whose kingdom is not of this world but comes by His Word and Sacraments.

Turn finally to hymn 773 and let us sing verses 1 & 3. St. Paul praises the public prayer for all by the body of Christ at worship. He says, “This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” The deeper meaning of Thanksgiving Day for Christians is not about a national holiday or even a single day. Like the cleansed Samaritan leper, we turn back to fall down before Jesus the source of our thankfulness as His baptized people. Throughout our lives, we remember His goodness in forgiving our many sins, His faithfulness in our weakness and struggles, and the thankful prayers in hope to His promising Word.

We ask tonight for God to continue His grace toward others, our nation, and our churches. His desire is to save and it comes from Him who loves a sinful world. Jesus said in the temple during Holy Week, “My house shall be called a house of prayer” Matthew 21:13). Confidence to pray comes from what God says. Since Jesus says, “my house is one of pray.” He proclaims the church as a holy place of prayer for His people. Prayer is part of the first fruits worked by the gifts God gives at public worship. Beyond an attitude of thankfulness that we can share with many, Christians pray knowing the answer thankfully comes by no other hand but Jesus Christ. He is Savior and giver of all good things. God is at work in the system is love that remains steadfast to turn hearts to Him. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thanksgiving#In\_the\_United\_States [↑](#footnote-ref-1)