

East Hartford
25 ord 2013

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Psalm 1, 1 Timothy 2:1-7

“Teach Us to Pray”

Show of hands? How many of us have ever prayed earnestly and fervently for or about something? Yup that's all of us. Do you remember praying for divine assistance with a math test, or an English exam, when you were in high school? How many of us have prayed for our kids, or the neighbor kids? As we lift the joys and concerns every Sunday, do you find yourself whispering a,
“Yes, Lord” when someone raises a health concern for a friend or family member;
“Yes, Lord” when someone says, “pray for our President and other world leaders”;
“Yes, Lord” when some one says, “a thank you that we were blessed.”

We hold that ancient prayer book, the book of Psalms, in our hands every Sunday morning and offer prayers from that text. Around the world, and across the millennia there are ancient and new places to pray: Hindu, Buddhist temples, mosques, synagogues, churches and cathedrals, the great, mysterious and silent stones of Stonehenge all testify to our human need and practice of prayer.

In case we are tempted to think that prayer has gone the way of the Passenger Pigeon, just for fun I googled “prayer”. I ran out of patience long before I ran out of search results. I can report to you, that as of yesterday, this evidence suggests that prayer is greatly upon contemporary minds and hearts.

Now the lesson that was appointed from 1st Timothy called upon Timothy to pray for every one. That phrase sounds like the promise and the hope that arises for all of us as we enter our time of morning prayer, as I read the prayer requests from our prayer mailbox, with their keyhole view into others' lives, heart longings, and heart breaks. Truly they are us. Our prayer goes on as we add our specific joys and concerns into the mix.

I find myself wondering what it all means, that we pray with and for the folks at the bus stop, with and for one another in naming the joys and concerns of our days. ... I think it means, at the very least, we and they are with one another, we are not alone, which also to say that God is with us. We never sit, or walk, or stand, we never weep, or laugh or rest alone. God is with each and all of us, always. To promise to pray, and, to pray together, is in fact to remind us of God's real and compassionate presence hence to evoke our thanks giving.

Unfortunately, not once but twice this week, our conference minister, Kent Siladi had occasion to called upon the clergy and the churches of the Connecticut conference to come together for prayer.

On Monday he wrote:
Colleagues:

In Romans 8:26 we hear the words: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words."

We are sighing once again. Today's shooting at the Navy Yard in Washington, DC, is another tragic reminder of the brokenness of our world. Our hearts go out to those who have lost loved ones in this tragedy. I would encourage us to pray and to continue to work for peace. We feel so helpless and often have no idea about what our response to such tragedies should be. Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Holy God,

We lift our hearts and streaming eyes to you today, as word of yet more violence assaults our ears. Magnify the skills of paramedics, nurses, and surgeons as they treat the injured. Focus the minds of police officers and investigators as they labor to determine the truth of what happened and identify those responsible. Lend strength of heart to those who will break the terrible news to suddenly grieving families and friends. And to all those who have lost today -- lost a loved one, lost health of body, lost

peace of mind -- bring comfort, healing, and renewal.

We await the full story of today's events, O God, but much more we await the day when we, your people, will at last turn away from violence, lay down our arms, offer each other healing, and embrace each other as your children. Until that day dawns, gracious God, we ask your guidance, mercy, and abiding love.

In Jesus' name, Amen

On Friday this came in our email:
Colleagues,

We began the week asking for your prayers for victims of a mass shooting, and we sadly end the week with a similar request, and for the intercession of the Holy Spirit's "sighs too deep for human words."

Once again, I encourage us to pray and to continue to work for peace. Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Loving and Holy One,

Yet another, yet another, yet another: An outburst of rage, a mind confused, a terrible choice to do evil. We have seen them all, and grieved. On Monday the Washington Navy Yard, and last night, O God, a neighborhood and a park in Chicago.

We pray that you would strengthen those wounded who are struggling for life and health. We pray that you would comfort those who love them and will care for them through their recovery. We pray for physicians, nurses, and therapists, for counselors and law enforcement officers, for friends and neighbors who will feel the impact of this trauma and must find a path to endure.

And we pray for our human family, O God. We've found too many reasons, and too many means to hurt each other. Cure our warring

madness, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Two thousand years ago, a man wrote to a man named Timothy, leader of a local church, and called upon him to “first pray for everyone.” then he advised Timothy and that early church, “Pray for kings and everyone who is in authority so that we can live a quiet and peaceful life in complete godliness and dignity.”

First as a superficial reading, let's just acknowledge that there seems to be more than a hint of vested self interest in the directive to “pray for kings and everyone who is in authority so we get to live a quiet and peaceful life.”

Timothy's church would have been living shortly after the long period of persecution of the early church, so to long for a quiet and peaceful life in which to minister was a very best hope in those times. Perhaps this prayer was echoed in Fiddler on the Roof, when Tevya asked, “Rabbi, is there a prayer for the Czar?” to which the rabbi replied, “May God bless and keep the Czar very far from us.”

But Timothy is also us, so we are admonished to pray for those in authority. Sadly, we now know that we are to pray for those in authority because humanity has yet to learn how to be humane, has yet to learn how to settle differences between neighboring people or neighboring peoples via conversation rather than guns, via negotiation rather than nuclear weapons as events in Chicago and Washington, as events in Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran and Syria are teaching us.

Now friends, when I picked the sermon title, “Teach Us to Pray” I expected weave those words, together with the admonition to Timothy, in some sense of talking about “how to pray.” I'm sure you remember how Jesus answered his disciples' request, “Teach Us to Pray.” According to the scripture Jesus then taught his disciples to pray in the words that we now call the Lord's prayer.

But this week, with two mass shootings in the United States and one

in Kenya, have intervened between the selection of a title and the writing of the sermon. So today , I place this sermon title before us, just as it stands as a prayer in itself. Teach us to Pray. Period. Stop. Just that. Teach us to Pray.

Today, I want to tell you that it matters that we pray, it matters to us, it matters to God.

And I want to tell you that it matters not how we pray, with rosary beads or without. Out loud in words that we understand - or not. In silent meditation -or not. In the prayer language of that we find in books, the prayers that are familiar favorites, the prayers that we scream or the prayers that we simply breathe. In language that is elegant and eloquent or language that is simple. Please, please, please – Thank you, thank you, thank you. It matters not whether we sit, stand, kneel, or lie down in preparation for sleep.

It does matter that we pray as Paul wrote to the churches in Thessalonika, saying, *16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* I believe that the only thing that matters to God, is that we pray truthfully, honestly. I believe the thing that matters to God is that we open our hearts and minds to God and then pay attention. May the sermon title become our prayer. Teach us to pray, O God. Teach us to pray. Amen.