

Message: TBD

{ Watch Piano Guys video – Bourne/Vivaldi }

Does anyone have any idea why we watched this video?

It’s entertaining, but there’s more to it than that. Let me ask the question a different way: how many of you recognized the theme music? The author is actually Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741), who was born in Venice, Italy. The piece is the Vivaldi Double Cello Concerto, re-arranged for piano and cello; music in the baroque style. Vivaldi was a priest with flaming red hair who suffered from asthma all of his life.

If I asked you to come and listen to baroque music, what would you say? A few of us would say “yes,” but most of us wouldn’t be interested. We don’t care for the style of music, it’s age or we just aren’t interested. But, by integrating classical music with a modern, popular context in a seamless way, the music becomes something fresh and new.

Telling people about Jesus and the Bible is the same. The narratives, songs and stories of the Bible are classical. Unfortunately, people don’t care for it’s style, age or they just aren’t interested. By integrating Scripture with modern, popular contexts, the good news of Jesus Christ becomes something fresh and new. The gospel becomes accessible to a new generation of people, leading others to follow Jesus.

That’s one of the reasons why we explore a variety of shapes and forms of worship, like the Messy Church gatherings we used after VBS and for Rally Day. Opportunities to learn the truths of the Bible and our faith, and how faith applies to our lives aren’t limited to one format, one type of liturgy, one style of worship service, or even one day and time during the week. What needs to clear is the focus of our teaching: faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. As long as that’s the goal, we’re free to explore different ways to experience God’s presence, to be transformed and to live our lives in a new way. 1 Timothy 1:5 says, “... *the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.*”

Our Scripture passage for today, 1 Timothy 2:1-7, is helpful for pastors, teachers and all who are Jesus’ disciples. Three of Paul’s letters, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, are commonly referred to as the

pastoral letters because the tone is encouraging and instructional. For example, 1 Timothy 1:18 says, “*I am giving you these instructions, Timothy, my child, ... so that by following them you may fight the good fight, having faith and a good conscience.*” While written for more general purposes, there’s the distinct flavor of a mentor writing to a colleague to offer advice.

The letters to Timothy have been misinterpreted and used in wrong ways in the past. We aren’t focusing on the controversial passages, but on the overall themes and the specific lessons offered in two passages, one this week and one next week. It’s worth noting the early church saw the letters as useful and helpful instruction to the church as a whole, so they included them in the canon of Scripture. That doesn’t mean the letters are a manual of how to act, but they do offer help in certain situations. To better understand how to apply today’s passage to our lives, it’s helpful to know about the background of the letter.

First of all, who is Timothy? What’s his relationship to Paul?

“Timothy is the son of Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5), the child of a Jewish woman and unnamed Gentile man (Acts 16:1). His grandmother’s name was Lois (2 Timothy 1:5). He’s a co-worker and companion to Paul, who traveled with Paul. That makes him important to Paul and establishes Timothy as someone of faith. Paul’s letters are written in the fashion of an older man speaking to a younger man, which implies Timothy is in his thirties or younger (1 Timothy 4:12).”¹

There are questions about who wrote the letters. Tradition says they were written by Paul; however, there’s a significant amount of evidence they were written by one of Paul’s students in Paul’s style. That was a common practice in those days. Rather than focusing on the issue of authorship, many scholars ask the question: “does their value depend on whether they were written by Paul or a disciple of Paul?” We don’t value the Gospels by who did or didn’t write them. The same is true for the other books of the Bible. These letters have been treasured for more than 1,900 years. They’ve proved to be of value and we can learn by studying them. For today, I’ll refer to Paul as the author.

¹ Achtemeier, Green and Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament*, Eerdmans, 2001, pp. 447-464
Material used in following paragraphs based on textual concepts.

There’s no doubt the letter was written to address specific problems and situations in the church. The first letter, called first because it’s the longest, is written to address false teaching, misconduct in the Christian fellowship and help define the order of the Church; who the leaders are. The first chapter sets up second chapter. Paul begins by writing about two ways of teaching: one way takes ideas from anywhere and everywhere, going around in circles, without a real understanding of what anything means. The other has a clear aim and focus, cuts out anything that gets in the way, and gets to the point. The later is preferable, particularly as regards the Bible and how faith applies to our life. This is what the author is addressing in the letter: what kind of teaching we should do and what kind of teaching we shouldn’t do.

Paul has two concerns that are reflected throughout the letters.

First and foremost, Paul wants everyone who professes Christian faith to allow the gospel to transform our whole lives. That means that the outward ways we show our faith come from deep within us in a real way. We really believe and we show it by what we do. That kind of faith “walks the talk.” It isn’t “do what I say because I’m the _____ (fill-in-the-blank: pastor, teacher, parent, older, etc.)”

Second, Paul wants every Christian, particularly teachers and leaders, to know how to build the community up in mutual love and support. The right kind of teaching and behavior can build a community up, large or small, no matter what problems it may face. The wrong kind of teaching and behavior can tear down a community, creating additional problems.

In his book Building a Discipling Culture Mike Breem writes:

“If you make disciples, you always get the church. But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples.... Effective discipleship builds the church, not the other way around. We need to understand the church as the effect of discipleship and not the cause. If you set out to build the church, there is no guarantee you will make disciples. It is far more likely that you will create consumers who depend on the spiritual services that religious professionals provide.”

With that background, the Scripture passage for today, 1 Timothy 2:1-7, offers some valuable instruction on how we’re to live our faith today.

The first, most important, thing Paul advises us to do is pray.

In 1 Timothy 2:1, Paul lists common types of prayer – supplication, intercession and thanksgiving. That’s where we’re to start. And I think you’ll agree that’s great advice. When in doubt, pray!

When you pray, who do you pray for? If I asked you to make a list, where would you start? If you’re like most of us, we start with our own needs. Next we would list the needs of our children or spouse, and then our extended family. That’s the circle of people closest to us. From there, depending on our conscience and convenience, we may pray for others in wider circles. For example, we might pray for someone in the congregation, at work or a friend. After that, we may, on occasion, pray for even wider circles, such as missionaries or the nation.

Paul changes things up a bit. In vv2-4, Paul advises us to pray for “*all who are in high positions.*” In other words, pray for the leaders of our nation and other nations first! Why? He goes on to offer an answer, “*...so we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and acceptable in the sight of God...*” Paul teaches us to pray for leaders so we can live in peace and quiet. When there’s conflict in the world or civil unrest in a nation, it’s hard to live with dignity or to honor God. There’s often little regard for human rights.

We certainly see that in our nation and across the world today.

From the killing of young black men to the assaults on police to the divisive nature of the presidential race to the conflict in Syria, we’re seeing little regard for unity, harmony or solidarity. The church has a role to play. Our role is to pray for the leaders of our city, state, nation and world. It doesn’t matter what faith they profess (Trump is a Presbyterian, Clinton is a United Methodist).

We don’t often think of praying for our leaders. That’s due, in part, because of a feeling of disenchantment or powerlessness. We feel helpless, don’t see an easy answer or think our institutions are corrupt and failures, so we don’t pray. There’s little urgency. We live in a country where we are content, for the most part. Regardless of who wins the election, the standard of living for the majority of Americans won’t change. We’ll still have a roof over our heads, cars in the garage, food on the table, entertainment and leisure activities. We may be

unhappy with how politicians spend our tax money, but we're comfortable and complacent for the most part.

But, if we were living in a country where there was civil unrest, violence or war, such as Syria, we'd be on our knees praying every day. If we lived in fear of a knock on the door after dark, what would we pray for? That's when we'd pray for good, strong, wise and just leaders. We'd pray for leaders to keep the bullies and those who are power-hungry away from us. We don't live in a country where we have those fears, but shouldn't we pray for the United Nations or for the leaders in those countries? It sounds strange. Why pray for the leaders, rather than praying for change? Some prophets among us may pray for change, but for most of us, we need stability to be able to maintain our relationships and to spread God's Word (v4). That's what we need to pray for, so others like us can have the courage to hold onto their faith.

That's the same distinction Paul was making to the congregation in the first century. The emperor of Rome expected people to pray *to* him as God. If you didn't, you might end up as the feature in the next coliseum games. Paul taught what Jesus preached: pray *to* God *for* the emperor, even when they're an enemy. That's counter-cultural. When we do, we're praying for God's will to be done. We're praying for the leader as part of God's plan for spreading the good news of Jesus, a message of love and forgiveness that transforms people and changes the world. When leaders are doing their job, even if they don't acknowledge God, they'll create social stability and enough peace to allow God's people to worship without being persecuted. That means families and communities can be built up following the way of holiness.

When the world is at peace, it's easier to spread the Word of God. In v7, Paul tells us God wants all people, regardless of their color, language, country of origin or faith to find true salvation. We're reminded there's one Savior, one mediator between God and humanity, and that's Jesus Christ. There is only one God. There's only one person who can mediate. And, most important of all, that person was also human, Jesus.

It's important for us to have people from different political parties, social circles, income levels, educations and backgrounds when we gather. That shows the power of God's love. When the world seeks to divide and to fight, we're called to reach out in love and friendship. When the world wants to be exclusive and discriminatory, we're called to be inclusive and caring. When the world wants to teach us that might makes right, we're called to reach out in prayer and peace. By reaching across the aisle and embracing our brothers and sisters with faith and love, we're God's agents of change in a world looking for spiritual health, grace and meaning. It's the way to wholeness and health as a nation, as a community of faith and as children of God.

Let's follow Paul's teaching. Let's intentionally pray for good, strong, wise and just leaders. Let's pray for Jason Scott, the mayor of the City of Corona. Let's pray for Vice Mayor Dick Haley, City Treasurer Aaron Hake and for Council Members Randy Fox, Eugene Montanez and Karen Spiegel. Let's pray for Governor Jerry Brown and the California State Senate and Representatives. Let's pray for President Barack Obama, the United States Senate and House of Representatives, and the United States Supreme Court. Let's pray for our presidential candidates, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Let's pray for Ban Ki-Moon, General Secretary of the United Nations and the representatives from all nations. And let's even pray for Bashar al-Assad, the president of Syria. Most of all, let's pray for God's will to be done. Pray for peace and dignity, a return to godliness, and for God's Word to spread.

If we begin each day praying for our leaders, and end each day praying for those closest to us, we'll see a change, though it may take time. It's how we can make a difference in the world. It's a great place to start, because we're relying on God's strength and power, not our own. And, even though we may feel weak, we know God is strong. As 1 Timothy 1:5 reminds us, that's the way of *“love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.”*

To God be the glory!

Psalm 4 (NRSV)

Answer me when I call, O God of my right!

You gave me room when I was in distress.

Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.

How long, you people, shall my honor suffer shame?

How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies? *Selah*

But know that the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him.

When you are disturbed, do not sin;

ponder it on your beds, and be silent. *Selah*

Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the LORD.

There are many who say, “O that we might see some good!

Let the light of your face shine on us, O LORD!”

You have put gladness in my heart

more than when their grain and wine abound.

I will both lie down and sleep in peace;

for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety.

1 Timothy 2:1-7 (NRSV)

First of all, then, I 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. This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all - this was attested at the right time. For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.