

A Call to Public Prayer | Luke 16:1-13; I Timothy 2:1-7 | LUMC | Sept 18, 2022 **By Rev Grace Kanake**

Dear Church family and friends: Today St Paul reminds us that one of our duties is to pray for ourselves, leaders, and for others. Paul wants us to be good stewards of prayerful life both in private and in public. Particularly in this reading, St Paul is asking the young Timothy, a missionary par excellence and in extension, us to pray publicly, especially for the leaders. This prayer call is urgent in our time; we need to pray for both secular and religious leaders. Let us remember that Paul made this request when Roman leaders were beginning to persecute the early Christians. My sermon today is about public prayer for leaders.

The prayer can be separated into five categories: the prayer of praise, the prayer of confession, the intercessory prayer, a petition prayer, and a thanksgiving prayer. Among these five categories, St Paul picks three and asks Christians to apply them during private and public prayers—the prayer of supplications, intercession prayer, and thanksgiving prayer.

Paul wants us to not forget these three categories as we pray for everyone including kings, presidents, members of cabinets, senators, members of the house of representatives, world parliaments and governments, world kingdoms, the judiciary, and the administrations.

Our prayers can be said for public offices from local to national level and the world. Our prayer also includes the church and religious leaders from the local churches, temples, and synagogues to the highest religious offices. St Paul strongly believes that praying for the religious and secular leaders is both a privilege and a Christian obligation. It is our duty to have an audience with God on behalf of others, and to ask God to grant people peaceful co-existence and good conduct. And above all, to provide people with tools for peace-making, and to pray for people to be saved. It is my belief that when people of faith pray genuinely, bringing every need to God, miracles happen because prayer works.

St Paul defines three kinds of prayers: *the supplication* (to present a strong urgent need to God and request God to answer). The need may be a specific, either an individual requests us to pray for it, or we know a need we want to bring to God's attention. Our current needs are many. You and I know of leaders who are asking Christians to pray for the coming elections to be Christ-led. What a moment for us to elect God-fearing leaders

Paul is asking Christians to intercede for the leaders and for others. We intercede because we know our superior God listens to our pleadings. Often Christians have strong gut feelings for others and are often moved by compassion to intercede for them. We pray for the "lost" to be found, for those intentionally planning to hurt others to stop, and for those planning to cause pain, to change their course of action. We know that humans are attracted to evil plans because of their finiteness. But God can forgive us and reform our limitations. Our God can influence our decisions in the

positive direction. We know St Paul's wicked life was changed, partly by the prayers of early Christians even when they were being persecuted. God changed Saul to St Paul from being a murderer to becoming a missionary par excellence.

Finally, St Paul wants us to consider saying a thank-you prayer to God for the leaders who do wonderful things by including God in their decisions. These leaders bring all ideas to the table seeking to use the best option for the benefit of their subjects. In a thank-you prayer we express our appreciation of them and their ability to be God-led. We thank God for early pilgrims who came here seeking a place where they could connect with God freely. We thank God for the past leaders both religious and secular. Today we enjoy blessings of the past American Christian prayers and their hard work. We thank God because the world is better today than thirty years ago.

For the past Christians, leaders, and ourselves, we thank God for the gift of grace and a life well lived! We pour out our gratitude to God for being kind to us, for offering us a second chance to live. For sure we were enslaved by evil thoughts, but God claimed us back into his reign. We now have a loving God we can call *Abba*, and appreciate the grace freely offered.

In the same strength we need to appreciate our long, faithful living. St Paul appreciates our being humble and trusting one another through our journey of faith, our being watchful and offering a continuing prayer of praise.

We should understand that St Paul encouraged Christians to pray for the secular leaders. However, he does not imply that we obey leaders who encourage us to disobey God. Neither can Christians engage in revolution or violence that some secular leaders thrive on because God never endorses the killing of others, or wonton damage of property and creation. Every prayer should be to our God of love and peace, not to a God in chaos (complete disorder and confusion).

When Christians sincerely pray, miracles happen, peace thrives, and people live a good life. God is adored and revered. Perhaps the reason there is so much evil in the world is because Christians are not praying enough. They have relaxed and slept on the job—the duty to pray. Hey, did we forget to pray for all people? How about we intensify praying that all people come to the knowledge of God and receive God's saving grace.

We have prayed and continue to pray for the Russia-Ukraine war to end. Prayers are being said and they are making a difference. One simple online click produces various ways US and world Christians—and even people of the other religions—are praying and can pray for this war to end. Prayers are written, prayers are said in songs, prayers are put in artwork, prayers are chanted, and prayers are explained in reflections.¹ This week, prayers are being effective, as the Russians appear to be withdrawing from some occupied territories in Ukraine. And the Russian president met with the Chinese and India presidents! The president of Russia says the president of China

¹ <https://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/prayers-for-ukraine/> (join 38 million people in this organization and read this prayer to feel its impact. This Prayer appear to being answered

and India “Expressed concerns on the Ukraine war” and feels these concerns and is doing what he can to end it. Could this perhaps be the groundwork to stop the war soon? How we pray to God for peace to prevail. It makes God and us sad to continue witnessing the killings and destroying of creation and properties.²

People of faith have prayed and are praying for the peace that St Paul is asking us to believe in. Pope Francis on Sept. 14th at The Seventh Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions—a meeting that brings together Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and other faiths” at Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan³--was categorical: “God does not back war”. Pope Francis had previously asked the Russian Orthodox leader, Kirill, who backs the war, to stop being “Putin’s altar boy” and pray for peace. This week I see the effect of the prayers in this war. I have no doubt that prayer for leaders works!

You also recall we prayed last month for Kenya to have peaceful elections and a calm transfer of power? The Kenyan elections were concluded last month but the opposition appealed the election results. They wanted the Supreme Court to nullify the election. After the court heard the case, it declared the election valid, and the president-elect was to take office on 13th Sept. 2022. In this election prayer worked against the former president and state organizations that supported the opposition candidate, God heard the prayers of the people.⁴ The power of prayer lasts forever! We can all recount public events we prayed for and the miracle that happened!

Friends, let us continue praying for secular leaders because we believe in a God of peace. I am particularly impressed with the Pope when he said at the all-religions meeting, “God is peace. He guides us always in the way of peace, never that of war.” Pope Francis and we hope for peace to exist within the world. The virus of injustice and poverty must be eradicated. And the “viruses” of hate and terrorism will not be eradicated without praying for injustice and poverty to end. This human-made “virus” causes us to pray earnestly.

This request from Paul to pray for our leaders can be realized in our situation. Let us start a chain prayer for our nation! We want this extreme heat to abate, and we want to respond to the environmental crisis that is crying for a response!

Certainly, most of us are tormented by the blame-game about who won the previous presidential election and who did not. This causes us to pray. We have an election coming and each party is gearing up to win. This causes us to pray.

We know our nation suffers from racial and economic disparities and holier-than-thou attitudes over who has the voice and who influences the system. This causes us

² <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/putin-vows-to-press-attack-on-ukraine-courts-india-china/ar-AA11TZ71?ocid=msedgntp&cvid=1180d596488647bf9165c1bc72d3e916>

Russian President Vladimir Putin, left, speaks to Chinese President Xi Jinping during the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, Friday, Sept. 16, 2022. (Sergei Bobylev, Sputnik, Kremlin Pool Photo via AP)

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³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/god-does-not-back-war-pope-says-apparent-criticism-russian-patriarch-2022-09-14/>

⁴ <https://www.kenyans.co.ke/news/79566-full-speech-rutos-first-address-kenyas-president>

to pray. Some credible research points to unrest, chaos, and a possible continued open culture of lies. This causes us to pray.

A report out this week from the Pew Research Institute says that US Christianity is declining, and if the trend continues, by 2045 we shall be a minority. This is because the young generations are not identifying with any religion. Neither do they identify strongly with God. This causes us to pray for reformation of our souls and the Christian life at homes and at work. What testimony we do give our youth? Do we care for them or for aged buildings and old archaic religious traditions? Oh, how St Paul reminds us to pray!

Amen