



The Amazing Generosity of Hearing “All”

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Scripture (NRSV):

1 Timothy 2:1-7

1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. 3 This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, 6 who gave himself a ransom for all—this was attested at the right time. 7 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.

Sermon:

I like to think that the author of 1 Timothy is asking us to pray for all those in power and with authority because he:

1. Knows what fear and violence, abuse and scorn look like for the tiny sect of Jesus followers. They have been marginalized, periodically persecuted, kept out of jobs and pushed to the edges where it is hard and difficult to live, and often it is tenuous and uncertain how one will live. Who will hire you? Who will instead, hold your faith against you, who will declare you an enemy of the state and drive you out of town?

So, the author is asking for prayers for leaders. Prayers that those in power will be the kind of leaders who are not bigots, not power mad, not prejudiced, narcissistic, xenophobic, cruel. There were then, as there are now... plenty of people in power like that. Stupid, or cunning, cruel and selfish.

So the letter writer asks everyone to pray for better.

Because then, there might be peace in life, dignity in life, respect in life, quiet in which to grow crops, raise children, say your prayers. The children won't be bullied; the homes won't be destroyed or the businesses confiscated. The people won't rise up against you and rape your women, crush your babies against the rocks, line you up against a wall and kill you.

Most of us here can barely imagine such a brutal culture and life of suffering. But it happened then, and it happens around the world, still.

So, yes, it would be good to pray, today and every day, for leaders who will not lead through such violence and fear!

In 1 Timothy they beg God for leaders of integrity and charity, honesty and decency. And they didn't have term limits back then!

And then, the writer comes around to his second point:

2. Universalism, that is, the belief that ALL are saved, none are sent to hell for endless suffering, none are lost to eternal damnation...universalism is a wonderful tenet of the Christian faith that many overlook. And it seems great, until we run into the blunt message of such mercy, such saving, offered to **ALL**.

Am I the only one here who has someone they *don't want to forgive*; someone I don't want to receive the gift of Jesus' ransom of us all? 1Timothy may say it, but I don't want to believe it. I harbor too deep an anger, a resentment, a horror of certain people...living and dead. I don't want them to receive mercy, I want them punished. They deserve to know "wrath", I tell myself. Whether it is Hitler, or the murderer of that little two-year-old girl in Spokane...nope, I know, deep inside, I want wrath for them. I am mean enough to hope they hurt.

But the text is perfectly straightforward, Jesus was the ransom to save all. (vs. 4,6)

I have to look at the floor, shrug my shoulders and with a twist of my lips, admit that this is something “I am still working on”. **I had better be.**

There is more than one occasion in the gospels where Jesus tells us stories of such great mercy and love, such unmerited generosity and forgiveness, that I had better be working on my growing forgiveness and love if I want to wear the name “Jesus follower”.

Jesus does not make it easy for us. We know this. The world of God, the kingdom of God, does not look a lot like the world of you and me.

Sometimes, we think we are there, or almost there. We don't lie (often), we don't cheat or steal, or sleep around, we recycle. We don't hurt kittens or babies.

That's nice but there is more to it than recycling.

Now we have to participate in God's mercy.

Now we have to show compassion for the shooter who murdered the children. Now we have to practice mercy to the person who stole our parent's life savings.

That is not to excuse them. That is not to ignore the consequences of such heinous and life-destroying actions. Mercy does not mean we will let them do it again.

But it is the challenge to no longer harbor hatred, no longer act out of vengeance and the hunger for revenge.

It is the challenge to be a different kind of human being...not the easy human of loving the loveable, being good to those who are good to us, befriending those who like the things we like and agree with our ideas and opinions. That is easy. We can do that, we know that, we even enjoy that. But it is not enough.

Following Jesus, listening to his stories of the Father who is loving to the unlovable child, generous to the worker who doesn't work a long hard day; when we see Jesus welcoming to

the stranger, the sick, and the other ones whom we don't like or understand...well, that is where this wild idea of love and mercy for ALL really comes alive. It will change us, stretch us, sometimes confound us completely...

And, I believe that at the end, when each life is acknowledged by its Creator and Maker, when each life meets its Source and its End...then, there may indeed be more mercy and generosity, more healing of wounds and wiping away of tears than we can imagine right now.

At the end of this life, and as we stand at the doors of our life in God...the tears wiped away may be our tears, the healing of wounds may be the healing of our wounds, and the amazing mercy and generosity of a God whose love and mercy are for ALL...that may be mercy extended to us, in our need. To each, and to ALL of us.

Thank God for the amazing generosity of hearing "ALL"! Amen.