

PASTOR'S NOTES. "That we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness"

*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.*

(1 Timothy 2:1-4, NRSV)

As we live now in a country that seems to be perpetually in election season, it is helpful for me to pause and reflect on the earliest Christians. They were just a few people, a minority living as second-class citizens in a world dominated by Roman power, fueled by multiple idols worshipped as gods (sometimes the Emperor himself was a god), and characterized by abusive and inhumane relations. The seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 almost all were in towns where a temple to another god was the chief engine of the economy; this was the source of most employment and the pressure to conform was huge. Further, the leaders were not elected; they were appointed based on their perceived loyalty to the dictator at the top.

To the typical Roman, there was no difference then between a Jew and Christian – both were seen as strange people who did not support the gods. The emperors were not fans of these people; Caligula routinely used them with lions as entertainment; Claudius was more tolerant of "Jews" but still had them expelled from Rome; Nero blamed the Christians for the trouble in Rome and tradition tells us he had many executed, including Peter and Paul. Later, some emperors would go much further in persecuting Christians. Throughout the Roman empire, local leaders with their own grudges could make life almost impossible.

In contrast, we have grown up in a country where we have lived with relative freedom, been told from childhood of our responsibility to vote, and our right to protest with our voice. The early Christians had no rights, no such power or influence. They lived at a time when about the best they could hope for was leaders who would ignore them and allow them to meet and spread the gospel in peace. What they often got were leaders who were hostile to them, and often they had to meet and share the gospel quietly and at personal risk. Yet in times like those, they wrote to the churches:

*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience.*

*For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.*

(Romans 13:1-7, NRSV)

*For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who*

*do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.*

(1 Peter 2:13-17, NRSV)

So what are they trying to say here? I promised myself that I would not start another multi-part article, so let me just offer a couple of thoughts:

1. Recognize that we are not in control, and that is ok. You will hear people say "God is in control," but most people would honestly admit that God's version of control does not suit them. God has patiently put up with insults and unjust conditions for much longer than WE think He should. Yet we ourselves are in His will because of His patience.

I confess that I have been at times a bit of a fanatic for my school's sports teams. So much that I might lose sleep when they lost, and I got razzed by others as if it were my fault. Sometimes I have had to step back and remember that while I can make noise about it, what happens in the game is not up to me, but players and coaches who are far more motivated than me to do well, and know far more about how they fall short.

I suspect that for many of us politics is similar. We have been told that our voice and vote is important, but in my lifetime 1976 was the only time that Ohio's part in the presidential election was close enough to warrant a recall (about 11,000 votes), and even then the contest had already been decided. It is safe for me to say that beyond the local church, neither in church or government politics has my vote ever been decisive.

Sometimes "letting go and letting God" seems like giving in to the corruption around us, but whatever noise I make in the world, the world still belongs to God and I have to trust in His purpose. This does not mean that every little thing that happens is good and part of God's plan... some of it will clearly be bad. But God's long-term purpose continues.

2. Recognize the humanity in others, even our enemies. In politics (and in sports as well), a lot of effort is made to paint the other as all evil and almost inhuman. The early Christians saw things differently: while our temptation is to seek the destruction of our enemies, their prayers were for redemption. All persons, even those in government, are to be treated with respect because they are a person in God's saving plan. So indeed, prayers, respect are due to all of them, even when they fall short of being "God's servant for your good."

I expect I will probably vote again, even though it has never proven decisive. I suspect that most of you will probably vote again as well. But let us remember that our hope does not rest in who wins this time, or even the next. Our hope is the One Who holds the final victory. Pray for each other, and pray for our leaders.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'Ken' written in a cursive, flowing style.