

**St. Paul Lutheran Church
Grant Park, Illinois
The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, July 22, 2018
Hebrews 13:7-8, 17-21**

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

I don't know how many (if any) of you actually use Twitter at all, but I'm willing to bet most of (if not all of you) have at least heard of it. How come? You've heard of it because it is one of the favorite methods which our president uses to communicate. I did a google search for Donald Trump and his twitter account was the first website which I could click on that was directly associated with him.

What is the reason for mentioning our president's twitter account? I bring it up because not only can our president get his message out to people, but people can directly respond to our president and what he has to say through Twitter. It is interesting dynamic but at the same time it is incredibly sad to see what people have to say about our president. There are many tweets filled with anger and horrible language directed towards him and those who support him.

Now, you might be wondering where I'm going with this. I can even see the cartoon word bubbles popping out of your heads asking, "Are you going to make today's sermon about politics?" I can reassure you my goal isn't to make my sermon about politics, but you and I can learn something from our president's twitter account. What can we learn? We're going to let our president's twitter account teach us about church leadership and what makes it important to pray for our leaders.

Our second lesson today introduces a section of scripture where God speaks to us about leaders in the church. The author of Hebrews writes, **"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."**

"Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way." These words pack a lot of instructions for us to digest, but we will break it down little by little to help us understand the importance of good godly leaders in the church and why we want to pray for them. The first thing which the author points out to us is he wants his readers to remember their leaders who have spoken the word of God to them.

This brings us to the first reason God wants his people to pray for their leaders in the church. Leaders such as a pastor or an elder are the ones who share the word of God with the congregation. You have called me to preach God's word to you. We have elders who we have asked to help me share that word with you and make sure I'm teaching the word to you in a correct manner. What makes it important to pray for me and our elders?

"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." It is important to pray for your leaders because you want to be assured you are hearing God's word in its truth and purity. Your prayers are because you want to come to church without worrying about whether or not you are hearing God's word. You want to know what you are hearing is true.

Am I being overly dramatic? Not when your eternal soul is at stake. The writer to the Hebrews states, **"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the**

sheep.” The author states two important truths with these verses. The first truth is Jesus is our savior from sin and the second truth is that he will always be our savior.

The reason Jesus is our savior from sin is because he shed his blood and rose again on our behalf. Jesus' actions on our behalf established an eternal covenant with God which says Jesus' death and resurrection forgives our sins and provides our way to heaven. The second truth is important because it reminds us that the first truth will never change. Jesus always has been, always is and always will be our savior.

You can picture it this way. Imagine you're out in the desert. It is hot. Dusty. Dry and you're walking in all that heat. What would you probably want more than anything in the world while in the desert? No, not an air conditioned car. You can't have one of those. What would you want for your walk? Wouldn't you want water? Clear, cold, beautiful water? You wouldn't want poisoned water would you? You would want water you could trust and didn't have to worry about.

Now, apply this truth to the reason why God wants congregation members to pray for faithful leaders. Whether you realize it or not, you are wandering through a desert wilderness. This world is a barren and sin filled world. It does not possess God's word. It is filled with hatred and strife and it leaves your soul thirsting for Jesus. The reason you come to church is because church is an oasis in a desert like world

Would you want to get to your oasis and find it is filled with poisoned water? Absolutely not. Now you know the reason you pray for godly leaders. You pray for a faithful pastor who will share the unchanging truth of Jesus' love for you and the forgiveness he has won for you. You pray for faithful elders and leaders in the church who make sure this truth is being shared with others. You pray for people to recognize when this truth is no longer being shared and they work to correct it.

Yet, what does any of this have to do with Donald Trump and his twitter account? I mentioned in my introduction it is sad to see the way some people feel they can speak to the president. They use vile and disgusting language. They demean him and the choices he makes. However, our president isn't innocent either. He insults people. He demeans those who attack him using crude and disgusting language too.

The way our president and others conduct themselves provides an interesting illustration for us. Their actions illustrate the way the sinful nature acts towards people in authority who don't do something they like. The sinful nature loves to grumble and complain about people in authority. It likes to challenge the decisions leaders make. It leads people to dig in their heels in and fold the arms across the chest while shaking their heads because they don't want to do what their leaders suggest to do.

President Trump (and some of his supporters) show the way the sinful nature reacts to challenges to authority. The response is often like two little boys out on the playground, "You shove me. I'll shove you harder. You shout at me and I'll shout louder. You say your dad is strong, guess what? My dad is stronger." All the while, they just keep building things up and building it up without any resolution.

Sadly, people in the church are sinners too who are often prone to acting in the same manner. The author of Hebrews addresses this issue in our lesson. **"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a**

joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.” The author of Hebrews is reminding us leadership in the church is hard because it involves dealing with sinful people.

I understand leaders in the church aren't perfect. Personally, I know how far from perfect I am (and our other leaders are), but I also know my savior. I know he covers over my sins and he has called me to be his representative to you. Sometimes this representation isn't easy because sinful people don't like to be told they are sinful. We all struggle with sinful behavior. We all do, but listen to what the writer to the Hebrews is calling you to do.

He is calling you to listen to your leaders and follow the choices they make. Did you hear the reason he stated for you to follow your leaders? **“They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”** God has charged the leaders of your congregation to watch over your souls and to help you on the way to heaven. God wants this to be a joy and not a burden for the leaders in his church.

How can you help be a joy rather than a burden? Pray that God opens your eyes and moves your heart to see when you are being a burden to the leaders rather than a joy. Are you bringing joy or being a burden when you complain about your leaders' choices or because you are not getting your way? Are you bringing joy or being a burden when you commend your leader for dealing with a difficult situation? Do you ask yourself before you speak, “Will this bring joy or a burden to my Christian leaders?”

Leaders, do you listen when the writer speaks to you, **“Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way.”** What is your response when someone is being a burden rather than a joy to you? Do you grumble and complain about the burden they are laying on you or do you pray to God for wisdom in dealing with the burden? Do you think about responding in kind or responding with kindness? What is the holy and honorable way which God wants you to respond?

Leadership in the Christian church is hard because it involves sinners working with other sinners, but thanks be to God that living according to his will isn't based in our sinful nature. **“May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”**

Our ability to work together will be blessed because it comes from Christ. Jesus is the one who has brought all of us here today. He is the one who empowers and equips us for doing what is according to his will. He is the one who gives us the perspective to understand whether we are being a joy or a burden to others because he is our ultimate leader who guides and direct us towards our final destination of heaven.

The reason leaders serve in the church isn't to bring glory to themselves. The reason leaders in the church serve is to bring glory to Jesus. This faithful service is what God wants all Christians to pray for and to look for in Christian leaders because he uses people to bring him glory. Thank you Lord for establishing the eternal covenant of salvation with us and please continue to send faithful leaders to proclaim this message to your church. Amen.