

October 16, 2016
Sermon for The Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Luke 18:1-18

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Luke 18:1–8 (ESV)

¹ And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. ² He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. ³ And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ ⁴ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’ ” ⁶ And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷ And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸ I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Every once in a while you hear about it in the news. Someone is arrested and convicted of a crime he didn't commit. Then years later some new piece of evidence comes to light, and a judge exonerates him after he's served years behind bars.

When we hear a story like this, we often think of how the system failed. Just look at how many years that person spent behind bars, and all along he was innocent!

But what if you had to look to a judge like the judge in today's parable? Unlike with the hypothetical person who eventually gets exonerated, the judge in the parable does nothing!

A widow comes to him for help, and over and over again, he refuses. The widow then is forced to keep at the judge, requesting just ice over and over again until he does the right thing and listens to her. The Text makes clear that he does the right thing in the end. However, he does the right thing not because he's had a change of heart, but simply to get rid of her.

Widows in biblical times had no power or economic future. They were among the weakest, most vulnerable members of society. For this reason, Old Testament law stipulated that the worshiping community care for them (Deut 14:28–29). God's people were repeatedly warned not to take advantage of the orphans and widows in their midst.

We're not told why this widow goes to the judge. We don't know what her exact problem was. We're not given the details. What we do know is that this woman went to someone who should have helped her in her quest for justice.

This widow in our text is a lot like our children when they want something. You know the routine. "C'mon, Mom, Dad, please! Please let me go! What'll my friends think if I'm not at the party? Please! Please! Please, let me go!" And they keep at it and at it. That's the intensity Jesus is talking about in this text. Don't give up. Keep at it.

Now there is a danger here.

You can almost get the sense from the text that prayer is reduced to an act of pestering God until God cries, “Enough!”

But the argument Jesus makes here is like the one He makes in the Gospel of Matthew, where he tells us: *“Which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”* (Mt 7:9–11).

The judge, who neither feared God nor cared about his fellow man, finally does the right thing, like evil parents who can somehow manage to feed and care for their own children.

The theological principle is in the *how much more*. How much more will God do what is right? When it comes to God, we’re assured that God listens and will surely grant justice to the ones who cry out to Him day and night.

Beyond persistence, this parable calls us to pray, to have courage, and to act on our faith. Picture Jacob, in our Old Testament Reading, wrestling with God through the night. It took courage to refuse to let go until he received a blessing. It took courage for that widow, who had nothing, to be persistent in her request.

Now as we read this text, many of us like to identify with the persistent widow. But how many of us identify with the judge?

There is a part in all of us that is a lot like that judge. Our natural state is not to fear God and not to care about anyone other than ourselves. Theologians throughout the centuries have often defined sin as being turned in on one’s self.

How many of us, when we see someone in need, turn the other way? “Oh, it’s not my problem. I don’t want to get involved.”

How many of us are oftentimes like this judge and relent only when we see it to be in our best interests? Maybe we get our picture in the paper... etc.

This woman was persistent even in the face of injustice. She could have given up, but she didn't. Jesus is teaching us to be persistent and to trust God, even when it appears to be futile.

But Jesus often uses parables to teach us more about who He is, and so it is here with this parable. Where do we see Jesus in this parable? We see Him in the persistent widow.

In the Gospel, when Jesus relates this parable, He is still outside Jerusalem. He is still some distance from the cross. Soon, however, He would arrive and experience injustice at the hands of Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, and crowds of people who would shout, "Crucify Him!" Still, even then, Jesus lives the kind of trust He speaks of in this parable. Jesus keeps faith with the One from whom He expects vindication at the end. He keeps faith all the way to Calvary and His death on the cross. *"Father, into your hands I commit My spirit!"* (Lk 23:46).

In this parable, Jesus teaches us to pray continually and never lose heart. Why? Because His promise is that He will grant vindication and justice for His chosen ones and will do so quickly. However, the vindication and justice He grants is not necessarily what we would have expected.

Jesus shows us that God's justice is not rightly understood until you first understand God's suffering love, a suffering love that has as its aim to make the sinner whole and the ungodly just. This suffering love is for people like the unjust judge, and it is for you and me as well.

Luther, when he teaches about prayer in his Small Catechism, says that we are to be confident when we pray. We "ask Him as dear children ask their dear father."

That's the language of relationship. We are God's children, and He longs for us to approach Him, describing to Him the needs of our lives and the longings of our hearts.

Do we do it once? twice? No! We pray continually. We never give up. Jesus ends this parable with a question: *"When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"* (v 8).

Will He find faith that is persistent and loyal?

And the answer implied in the question is yes, He will!

He will find people like those mentioned just following our text. He will find faith in people like the tax collector, who humbled himself and beat his chest imploring God for mercy.

He will find faith in people who, like the little children, look to Christ and trust Him implicitly.

He will find faith in people like the blind beggar, who cried out to Christ for healing and mercy.

He will find faith in people like you and me. For we, too, are a people who stand before God imploring Christ for mercy and leaning on Him for everlasting hope.

So can we pray and not lose heart? Yes!

Can we pray and not give up? Absolutely! For we know to whom we belong. Peter the apostle has said, “[Cast] *all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you*” (1 Pet 5:7).

He cares for you and, unlike the judge in today’s parable, God wants to hear from you. You are His beloved child. So take heart!

Pray Continually and Do Not Lose Heart.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.