

Faith That Persists
October 15 and 16, 2022
19th Sunday After Pentecost
Third in a Series of Four Sermons - "Faith Alive"

Luke 18:1 - Jesus told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Our sermon series in October is "Faith Alive."

- Last Sunday - Faith that gives thanks
- Two weeks ago - Faith that is growing
- Next week - Faith that begs
- Today - Faith that persists

A story is told of a judge who summoned the two opposing lawyers into his chambers. He looked them in the eyes and declared that both of them had presented him with a bribe. Both lawyers squirmed uncomfortably. "You, Attorney Leon, gave me \$15,000. And you, Attorney Campos, gave me \$10,000.

The judge reached into his pocket and pulled out a check. He handed it to the one who had given the greater amount. ... "Now then, I'm returning \$5,000, and we're going to decide this case solely on its merits."

That judge reminds us of the judge in today's parable. Jesus noted that he neither feared God nor cared about people. In him there was no kindness, no tenderness, no sympathy, no anything that was good and right and just. Even though the law was on her side, he could not have cared less. Even though she pleaded and demanded and begged for him to do the right thing, He would not give her the time of day. He waved her off. He tried to ignore her. He may well have hidden when he saw her coming. Not even a hint of hope did he offer. If we didn't know better, we would think that he didn't even possess a conscience.

She had every human reason to grow weary, to lose heart, and to give it up as a lesson learned. But she was not that kind of a woman who just let it pass by. She would not allow herself to be ground under foot by the very man who was appointed to the bench in order to help.

One pastor imagined it this way, "*She waylaid that judge every time he walked home. She accosted him. She told him of the unrighteousness of those that were*

oppressing her. Every time the court was open, there she was, saying words to him, telling him that he should be ashamed of himself, telling him that he ought to do the right thing. Every time he appeared in public, there she was, pestering him, scolding him, all day and all night.”

A paraphrase of verse 5 could read this way, ***I better do something about this woman cause if I don't she is going to bust me in the chops. She's going to give me a beating. She's going to give me a black eye. One scholar translated, "she's going to claw out my eyes."***

She wasn't wealthy, she didn't have any high class lawyers, she didn't have any money to hire fine legal counsel, but she got what she wanted because she stayed with it. She didn't give up. She kept crying out for mercy, and she did not grow weary of making her case to the one who could give her justice.

Two lessons we would learn today about not losing heart and to keep on praying for God to work things out for our good and His glory in the circumstances of life.

Reason #1 to keep on praying and never lose heart is to be remembering God's reputation

Today's parable is all about contrast. The first contrast is between the unrighteous judge and the Son of Man who will one day soon return to judge the living and the dead. The argument is from the lesser to the greater. If even an unrighteous judge who neither respects God nor cares about people will eventually give justice to a widow so that she doesn't claw his eyes out, how much more so will a God who delights in showing mercy vindicate His chosen and dearly loved people.

Throughout Scripture, it is clear that God cares deeply about His reputation, and at the same time loves His us dearly.

Exhibit #1 is at Mt. Sinai where the people of Israel lost patience with God / turned in their rings of gold / made a golden calf / built an altar before that golden calf and worshiped and feasted in its presence / the Lord deciding to consume them with anger and start over with Moses / Moses pleading - "imagine the Egyptians making fun of you for bringing your people out of slavery with evil intent? / What would the neighbors say? Remember your promise to Abraham and Isaac and Israel that their descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. At which point the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

James writes it this way, “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”

If the prayers of one righteous person like Moses results in God relenting and changing course in terms of bringing disaster on an entire nation, imagine the effect of a dozen righteous people, or an entire congregation of believers storming the gates of heaven that His name would be kept holy in our midst, that His Kingdom of grace would come more and more into Citrus County, and that every bit of adversity in your family circle and in mine would produce endurance, and that endurance would build character, and that more and more Faith Lutheran would be like a little city of lights attracting broken and hurting souls from miles away to Christ crucified, risen, ascended, and coming back again soon

The judge in our parable had a reputation for disrespecting Yahweh, but the Judge to whom we pray lived and died with a singular purpose - to do the will of his father. The judge in our parable had no regard for the lowly and the outcast, but the Jesus to whom we pray is drawn to the broken hearted and will never despise them. The judge in our parable again and again refused to answer desperate pleas for justice, but the God to whom we pray will answer every proper prayer in the way that is best for our souls, our hearts, our minds, and our character. The judge in our parable had to be bullied into doing the right thing but it is the nature of our God to do what is good and right and salutary in every one of our circumstances, with no exceptions.

A story is told about a very famous man whose favorite memory in life is a surprising one. Of all the experiences in his memory bank, the one that stood out was of a time when a little girl came up to him on a crowded street corner and asked for his help to cross the street to the other side. Then she put her little hand in his big hand and across they went.

Dear friends in Christ, as that great man was honored to take that trusting little girl across to the other side, so is your Father in heaven ever so pleased when you and I put our trembling hands into His steady one and confidently walk with Him to the other side of every one of our trials.

Story of my mom in her last days. I’m at her side, she falls asleep. I reflect on her love for her family, her faith, and her life. She opens her eyes and sees me crying. She asks why. I say, “Because you’re dying.” To which she replied. “I’ll be fine.”

She believed that Jesus was her Savior, that her sins had been forgiven, and that her mansion in heaven was on reserve. Therefore, she could say, "I'll be fine."

She believed with all her heart that the crucified Christ had risen from the dead on the third day, He had ascended into heaven on the 40th day, that he was sitting on the right hand of God the Father Almighty every day, and that one day soon He would be returning to judge the living and the dead. Therefore, she could say, "I'll be fine."

Or to use the language of our text, she had learned from her parents' knees that her God had earned a reputation of keeping every one of his promises at just the right time. Therefore, she could say what all of us can say, by faith, in every one of our days, no matter what - "I'll be fine."

Reason #2 to keep on praying and never lose heart is to be rejoicing in our status before Him

Reason #1 to not grow weary and keep on persisting in pray was to simply be remembering and reviewing and reflecting upon the past record of our God. We do that every time we gladly hear and learn the Word of God. Reason #2 is to keep on rejoicing in our status before God.

Scriptures give us all kinds of metaphors to help us to have a faith that perseveres. We are invited to see ourselves as a child who is able to approach her father with petitions and requests any time of the day or night. Or we can see ourselves as sheep whose shepherd is following us around with goodness and mercy. Or we can see ourselves as athletes coached and counseled by none other than the Holy Spirit of God. Or we can see ourselves as servants humbly doing our duties in the presence of a King who has our best interests at heart. Or we can see ourselves as soldiers in the Lord's Army, where the final victory is assured and our Commanding Officer sees and knows everything there is to see and know.

But in today's parable, we are contrasted with a widow, who in ancient society had no standing whatsoever. She had no money with which to bribe the judge, in contrast to you and me, who have been purchased not with gold or silver, but with holy precious blood, and the innocent suffering and death of our Savior.

This widow had no man in her life that would make sure she was treated fairly, but we have Jesus Himself defending our case in court and advocating on our behalf.

This widow could be ignored by the unrighteous judge all year long, but are promised that the very creator of this universe will never ignore a single prayer of ours, as long as it is offered in faith.

Three takeaways from this parable, in closing.

- Takeaway #1 is the verb, “to be long-suffering.” It is that God will never be indifferent nor unresponsive to the cries of His dearly loved and chosen people. God will vindicate us sooner or later, not because of our persistence in prayer, but because it is His nature to be merciful and compassionate.
- Takeaway #2 from this parable is that God did vindicate His people quickly on a little hill outside of Jerusalem. There our Savior paid the ransom price that needed to be paid. Divine justice was delivered by way of a cross, and vindication was, is, and ever will be seen in the resurrection of Christ from the dead.
- Takeaway #3 is in the surprising question Jesus asks at the end of the parable, “***Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he even find the faith on the earth.***” In other words, when Jesus returns, will there be a faithful community awaiting? One more time, Jesus would alert us to the importance of listening carefully to the teachings of God’s Word to this end - that along with the widow in our text, we would be numbered among those who keep on praying and never lose heart. Amen.