

**Annoying God:
October 16, 2022**

I have never had trouble sleeping. **[1 Asleep]**
As a matter of fact...
I'm one of those people...
When my head hits the pillow...
I'm asleep.

Around 9:30 at night...
Janet and I have the same conversation...
Over and over again.

She asks... are you ready to go into bed...
You know... so we can watch...
The end of the House Hunters episode...
That we were watching in the living room.

And every night...
I react like a petulant child.
NO! I'm not ready to go to bed.
Because I know...
The minute my head hits the pillow...
I won't see the end of House Hunters...
And I won't see the first ten minutes...
Of the local news.

I will only see the back of my eyelids.
And that will be that.
My point is...
I'm good at sleeping... historically.

However... recently...
The last six months or so...
I've been waking up.
In the middle of the night...
Anywhere between 12:30 and 3:30 am.

And every time I wake up.
I have someone on my mind.
Someone I feel like I need to pray for.
Or the church.
Or our community.

And I begin to swirl.
Can't stop my brain!
Any other nighttime swirllers out there?
Then you know what I mean.

When I can't turn my brain off. **[2 Lord's Prayer]**
This is what I do...
I start praying the Lord's Prayer.
To calm my heart and mind.

And I keep repeating it...
Until I drift off to sleep.

When I start thinking about...
The problems and troubles of the world...
Instead of the prayer... that I'm praying...
I stop. And start over. Begin again.
Our Father...

It works for me... eventually...
And somehow...
In the process...
I feel like...
It draws me closer to God...
In a time of need.

So the gospel lesson we have today...
Is kind of about prayer...

To be honest... It's a story... I don't really like.
I'm not entirely happy...
With this parable of Jesus.
But Jesus is God... so of course... God wins.

I don't like it...
Because it's confusing.
Sends the wrong message...
In my humble opinion. **[3 Persistent]**

Sometimes... this parable is called...
The Parable of the Persistent Widow.

Sometimes... this parable is called...
The Parable of the Unjust Judge.

It has two names.
Because there are two characters.

A woman... who will not give up. She is persistent.
And a judge... who eventually does give up. He is a jerk.

And what bothers me... is...
It seems like the point of this story...
Is that if we just persistent enough...
You know... if we ANNOY God enough...

Eventually...
God will give up...
And give us whatever we want.

So. Everybody just be annoying.
And eventually... God will help you.
Amen?

I think not.
That doesn't track.
Doesn't seem...
Like a good lesson...
For our faith journey...

Or the right way...
To look at our relationship with God.

And as a matter of fact...
Jesus makes it pretty clear...
In this lesson... that...
God is not like... the Unjust Judge. **[4 Unjust]**

The Unjust Judge...
Has no fear of God.
And fear means...
The kind of respect...
That God deserves...

Since he doesn't fear God...
He has no reason...
To follow the way of God.
He has no faith in God.

Without faith...
The Judge has no internal compass...
No sense of right and wrong.
No way of deciding what is good...
In the sight of God...
Because he just doesn't care.

He has nothing...
But his own thoughts... and desires...
To guide his decision making.

No Holy Spirit.
No Word of God.
Nothing.

So it would be strange...
To make that kind of human being...
Represent God in the parable.

In addition... the Unjust Judge...
Has no respect for people.
He doesn't care about people.
What they say...
What they think.
What they need.

He sounds like a pretty nasty guy. He just doesn't care.

A few years back... **[5 Lovejoy]**
The Simpsons had an episode...
About the pastor of their hometown of Springfield.

And in that episode...
Rev. Lovejoy said these words...
Marge Simpson has taught me...
There's more to being a pastor...
Than not caring about people.

It's funny... first of all...
Because it doesn't make sense.

But it's also ironic...
One of the primary reasons to exist as a pastor...
Is to love and care for the people of God.
But it's not just pastors...

We all are called to love and care... **[6 Command]**
For each other.
By Christ himself.

It's one of the two rules...
Jesus explained...
As the summary of the whole Law of God.

First... Love God.
Secondly... Love each other.

Just two rules...
It's not that hard.

But this guy.
This Unjust Judge...
Doesn't seem to heed...
Either of those commands.

He does not respect God.
He does not love people.

He cannot possibly represent God...
In this parable.

But even so... eventually...
Because of the other character...
In the story...
That persistent widow...
The Unjust Judge gives up.

Not because she's good...
Not because it's the right thing to do...
But because she's annoying.

Yes. Fine.
I'll give you whatever you want...
As long as you just...
Leave me alone.
Be quiet. Hush up. Go away.

Like a parent dealing with a child... **[7 Angry Child]**
Who won't give up.
In the check out line...
At the Target.

And finally...
Just to get a minute of peace...
They buy them...
The candy...
Or the piece of junk toy...
Or whatever else...
Has caught the child's eye.

Yes you can have what you want.
I give up.

You see. **[8 Broken]**
It's all broken.
It's a messed up story.

It's not a loving response.
It's not based on the goodness of the giver.
It's all messed up.

And that's the point.
Jesus goes on to say...
If this guy... who is the complete opposite...
Of everything that God is...

If he can do the right thing...
Because he's completely exhausted...
By the tenacity of this woman.

Just think.
How much more... God...
Will do for you.

God. Who loves you.
Who wants you to have a good life.
Who cares about what happens to you.

How much more...
Is God going to hear your cries...
Both night and day.

How much more is God willing... to grant justice...
To those who seek him.

How long will God delay in helping you.
When you cry out.

In this parable... Jesus is telling us...
To have faith in God.
To believe in our hearts...
That God loves us...
And intends for us...
To have good strong whole healthy lives.

So... it's good... to talk to God.
It's good to pray.

To let God know...
What we need.
What we want.
What we are experiencing.

As long as we understand...
That doesn't mean.
We will get everything that we want.

So. These are actual answering machine answers... **[9 Answer]**
Recorded and verified by the world-famous...
International Institute of Answering Machine Answers...

For those of you who are chronologically challenged...
Answering machines functioned like voicemail does now.

These are voicemail greetings....

Hello, you are talking to a machine.
I am capable of receiving messages.
My owners do not need siding, windows, or a hot tub,
And their carpets are clean.

They give to charity through their church
And do not need their picture taken.

If you're still with me,
Leave your name and number
And they will get back to you.

Another one:
Hi. I am probably home.
I'm just avoiding someone I don't like.
Leave me a message,
And if I don't call back, it's you.

Another one:
Hi, this is George.
I'm sorry I can't answer the phone right now.
Leave a message,

And then wait by your phone
Until I call you back...

My point is...
We don't always get the answer that we want.

And I'm not going to stand up here today...
And try to justify God.
Or defend God's action or inaction.

I'm not going to pretend...
That I understand why...
Some prayers go unanswered...
Or why we have to deal with difficult things...

But I will tell you... I don't think...
That's the ultimate goal of prayer.

The reason we talk to God...
Isn't because God...
Is some kind of magic genie.
Granting all our wishes.

It's because God loves us.
And we love God. **[10 Relationship]**

It's a relationship.
And when you're in a relationship...
It is always changing...

Either we do things...
To strengthen our relationships...
Or we do things...
To weaken our relationships.

Have you ever been in a relationship...
Where someone won't talk to you.
It's horrible. And lonely. And hurtful.

Well... God wants us to talk.
The way we talk to God is prayer.
And listen... your words don't have to be fancy.
Or flowery. Or liturgical. Or even holy.

God knows us... inside and out.
We are not going to impress God with our words.
And we're fool God by presenting ourselves falsely...

God wants us to be honest.
About who we are.
What we need.
What we are experiencing.

So just talk to God.
The same way...
You would talk to friend.
Someone you love and trust.

One more thing.
Not everything requires us...
To wait on an answer from God.

There are some things...
That happen to us...
That we can do something about.

I like this photo. **[11 Shovel] READ!**

Right. We can tell God anything.
But we need make sure...
That our works... our actions...
Are in line with the will of God.

So. If we're praying that God will intervene...
We also need to ask ourselves...
What does God want me to do...
Who does God want me to be...
In this situation.

Stop looking for a miraculous solution.
Start working toward the good God intends.

What I'm saying is...
Sometimes... we need to quit blaming God...
And start getting to work.

It's a balance. **[12 Balance]**

This is where faith comes in.
Not just passive faith...
Waiting on God.
But faith active... in love.

The question Jesus asks...
At the end of this parable...

Even though God hears your prayers...
Jesus asks...
When the Son of Man comes...
Will he find faith on earth?

What he means is... When Jesus returns...
Will there be anyone...
Who still believes?

Who still cries out...

Who still turns to God...
For help... comfort... and strength.

Will there be anyone...
Who lives out their faith...
Through their words and deeds...
In this tired old world?

What do you think? Will there be?
I think the answer is yes.

You are the evidence.
You are the proof.
That faith lives.

That's why we are here.
We are the people of God.
We believe.
We trust.
We pray.
We work.

And we live each day...
Centered and focused...
In Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thanks be to God.
Amen.