

Praying and Not Losing Heart

Bible reference for sermon Luke 18:1–18

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. ²He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. ³In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my accuser.’ ⁴For a while he refused, but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’” ⁶And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ⁸I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

Grace and peace to you from God our Creator, and from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Luke tells us that Jesus shared this parable “about the need to pray always and not to lose heart.” That’s how the story begins — before a single widow knocks or a single judge grumbles. Jesus speaks these words as he journeys toward Jerusalem, where the cross awaits. As we heard in Pastor Nev’s sermon last week, we are, in Luke’s Gospel, deep in that long road toward the centre of suffering and redemption. The shadow of the cross stretches over everything he says now. It’s as though Jesus is preparing his disciples — and us — for the hard truth that life in God’s reign is not instant deliverance, but faithful persistence. This is not a parable told from the safety of success, but from the road of struggle. It’s about prayer that rises up in a world where justice seems delayed, where hope feels fragile, and where faith itself can falter.



The story Jesus tells is deceptively simple: a widow keeps coming before an unjust judge, pleading, “Grant me justice against my opponent.” Two characters. That’s it. And yet they couldn’t be more different. The judge is a man of power and privilege. He doesn’t fear God or respect people — Luke tells us that right away. He is the

embodiment of indifference, of systems that grind on without mercy. He is not merely a bad man; he is a symbol of every institution that forgets compassion. The widow, on the other hand, is the very image of vulnerability. In that ancient world, a widow was among

the most powerless of all people — no husband to advocate for her, no social standing, no inheritance to secure her place. She is society's forgotten one. And yet, she refuses to be silent. She persists.

If this were a courtroom drama, the odds would be entirely against her. But Jesus flips the script. The woman's weakness becomes her power. Her persistence becomes her weapon. And the judge — this smug, self-satisfied bureaucrat — is undone by her relentless courage.

If this story sounds familiar, it should. Because the barriers that stood between that widow and justice are still very much alive today. The first barrier is apathy — the cold indifference of those who have the power to help but simply do not care. The unjust judge's sin is not active cruelty; it's that he doesn't bother. He has become desensitized to suffering. How often does our own culture mirror that posture? When prayers for peace are met with political calculation, when cries for justice are answered with silence, when victims of violence are told to "be patient" — we are hearing echoes of that same indifference.

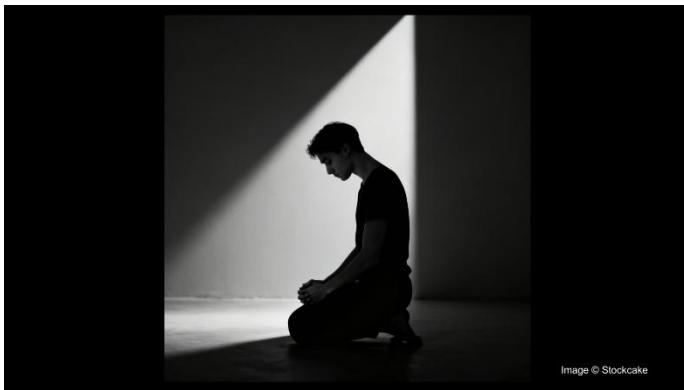
The second barrier is fatigue — the sheer exhaustion of those who labour for change and see so little result. "Will justice ever come?" we ask. "Will God ever act?" Jesus tells this parable precisely because he knows how easily we lose heart. And the third barrier is fear — the fear that our efforts don't matter, that our prayers rise into an empty sky. Fear that maybe God is like that judge after all: distant, unresponsive, unmoved. These are not ancient problems. They are the wounds of our present world.

But Jesus does something brilliant in this parable. He draws a contrast, not a comparison. "If even an unjust judge," he says, "finally responds to the persistence of a widow — how much more will God, who is just and loving, grant justice to those who cry to him day and night?" This is not a story about nagging God into submission. It is a story about God's faithfulness, God's persistence, God's unrelenting love. Our God is not a reluctant giver, coaxed by our constant begging. Our God is a parent whose heart breaks at our suffering. Our God is not like the unjust judge — our God is justice itself, already moving, already hearing, already at work even when we cannot see it.

Jesus says, "God will quickly grant justice." And we want to say, "Quickly? Really?" How can we reconcile that promise with the slow grinding of history — with wars that drag on, systems that oppress, prayers that seem unanswered?



Here's the paradox: God's "quickly" is not the same as our "instantly." The Greek phrase *en tachei* can mean "soon" or "suddenly" — like lightning flashing across the sky. God's justice is not measured by our clocks but by God's promise. It may seem delayed, but when it comes, it comes with transforming power. So Jesus' word to us is not a timetable but an invitation to trust — to live as though justice is coming now, to embody that justice through our persistence, our resistance, and our hope. Faith, in this sense, is not passive waiting. It's active anticipation — living today as though God's tomorrow is already breaking in.



And yet, we all know the ache of prayers that seem unanswered. We have prayed for healing that never came, for reconciliation that never happened, for peace that still feels impossibly far away.

We have watched loved ones suffer and wondered if heaven was silent.

But unanswered prayer does not mean God's absence. Sometimes it means God's presence in ways we cannot yet see. Sometimes the answer comes through the quiet companionship of others, through resilience we didn't know we had, through the slow unfolding of grace. The mystery of prayer is that it draws us closer to the heart of God, even when it doesn't change our circumstances. In those moments, when God feels silent, faith itself becomes the prayer — the small, stubborn hope that God is still listening, still holding, still working for life even through the shadows. The cross teaches us that even when the heavens seem closed, God is still redeeming the world from within its pain.

God's persistence is the gospel itself. The entire biblical story is the story of a God who refuses to give up on creation. God persists in love even when humanity, even when you and I run the other way. God persists through covenant, through prophets, through exile, through incarnation, through the cross. And on that cross — that place of apparent defeat — God's justice and mercy meet. There, the persistent love of God becomes resistance against all the powers of death.



So when we persist in prayer, when we stand up for the oppressed, when we refuse to lose heart, we are not manufacturing our own endurance. We are participating in God's endurance. The Spirit gives us the courage to keep knocking.

Too often, prayer is treated as a transaction — words offered up to a distant deity who may or may not respond favourably. But this parable calls us to a different imagination. Prayer, in Jesus' teaching, is relational. It is communion with a God who is already present, already listening, already working for justice. When we pray persistently, we are not trying to convince God to care; we are allowing God to align our hearts with God's own care.

We cannot forget where Jesus is heading when he tells this story. He is on his way to Jerusalem, where the full weight of injustice will fall on him. The empire's judge — Pilate — will wash his hands, and the innocent will be condemned. In that moment, it will look as if the unjust judge has the final word. But the resurrection will reveal that God's justice cannot be silenced, that death itself will yield. So this parable prepares us for that holy tension — between the world as it is and the world as God promises it will be. Between our unanswered prayers and the assurance that God hears every one of them. Between Good Friday's cross and Easter Sunday's dawn. In the place of Holy Saturday.

How does this parable speak to us now? It means that faithfulness is not measured by success but by persistence. We are called to be a people who keep showing up — in prayer, in protest, in love — even when the systems around us remain unjust. It means that justice work and prayer work are not separate callings. Every prayer for "thy kingdom come" is a political and spiritual act — a declaration that we will not accept a world that denies God's vision of equity and compassion. It means that our hope is not naïve. We do not pray because it always works; we pray because God always works. We pray because in prayer we remember who we are and whose we are. And it means that our persistence is holy. Every act of faithfulness, every small resistance to despair, every cry for justice is part of the Spirit's own heartbeat.

Jesus ends with a haunting question: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" It's not a question meant to shame us. It's an invitation to reflection. Will he find people still praying, still hoping, still persisting in love — even when the world has grown weary? Faith here is not belief without doubt. It is courage without giving up. It is the widow's voice echoing through the centuries: "Grant me justice." And God hears. God always hears.

We live in a weary world. We see violence, inequality, disease and death, and so many prayers that seem unanswered. Yet the promise of this parable is that none of our cries are in vain. Our prayers are not wishful thinking; they are participation in the very work of God. Every "Thy kingdom come" is a joining of our hearts with the One who is already making all things new.

As we celebrate Raf becoming part of God's family we are reminded that God's love is steadfast and never gives up on us — just as the persistent widow never gave up seeking justice. Raf's baptism marks the beginning of a life lived in that same trust and persistence. It tells us that even when prayers seem unanswered or the world feels unfair, God is always listening, always working for good. In baptism, we are joined to Christ's own perseverance and promise — the assurance that God's grace will hold precious Raf, and all of us, through every struggle, teaching us to keep praying, keep loving, and never lose heart.



So keep praying. Keep resisting. Keep trusting. For the God we worship is nothing like that unjust judge. Our God is the one who, in Christ, bends down to hear the cry of the widow, the refugee, the prisoner, the wounded, the weary. Our God is the one who took the cross into God's own heart — and

there began the great reversal of injustice itself. Do not lose heart. Justice is coming — sometimes slowly, sometimes suddenly, but always surely. And when the Son of Man comes, may he find in us a people still praying, still hoping, still working for the world God loves..

Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul's Lutheran Church Youtube page <https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>