

Pentecost 22
October 16, 2016

“Keep Praying! Keep Praying! Keep Praying!”

LUKE 18:1-8

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ² He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. ³ And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ ⁴ “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!’” ⁶ And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.

Beneath the large O’Hare Airport in Chicago is a long 850 foot underground tunnel where people walk from one concourse to the other. The long walk is made easier by a moving walkway and interesting light displays with music to entertain you as you glide along. There is also this voice that keeps saying, “Keep walking. Keep walking. Keep walking” to encourage you to walk on the moving walkway to help your walk through the tunnel.

Today we hear our Lord Jesus tell a story or parable that encourages us to keep praying, keep praying, keep praying and not give up. He tells the story of a widow who pleads with a judge to help her. When he tries to ignore her she keeps on pleading with him and doesn’t give up.

During this election year we are keenly aware of how important it is for us to pray for our country. In 1 Timothy 2 the Apostle Paul encourages the Christians living in the Roman Empire to pray for their government. “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone- for kings and all those in authority.” We cannot give up praying for our government.

Prayer is such a wonderful opportunity to help not only our government but all people. So we pray for our family. We pray for our congregation. We pray for members who are going through difficult times. We pray for people who do not believe in Jesus as their Savior. We pray when important tasks and challenges face us. Jesus said we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We pray to be that salt and light.

I need this story that Jesus tells us this morning and so do you. We need this story to encourage us to keep praying, keep praying, keep praying, and not give up.

The story

Jesus was such a good storyteller because his stories or parables have an element of surprise in them. So it is with this story about a widow who persists in pleading with

judge that could care less about her. Jesus said, "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men." This story gets our attention. We can relate to this. We have heard of judges who really don't care that much about people. We have heard about judges who could care less about God even in the Supreme Court of our land.

The poor widow in this story does not seem to have a chance of getting help from such a bad judge. "And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'" Do people ever take advantage of widows? They certainly do even to this day. Jesus said of the Pharisees in Luke 20, "They devour widow's houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished severely." Here is a widow who was ripped off. Now she is in court pleading for justice.

She certainly doesn't get much help from this judge who doesn't care about God and doesn't care about people. But that doesn't stop her. She persists in her efforts to get help from this judge. "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming.'"

This widow was like a pesky fly that wouldn't go away. A couple of Sundays ago, I was sitting in my stress less recliner dosing off into a nice nap. A very pesky fly decided to make me the object of its attention. So it would land on my nose, then my forehead, then my hand, then my arm. Every effort to get rid of the fly failed. That's why we have a flyswatter hanging in the garage.

This widow was worse than a pesky fly to this unfair judge. He could not go to work without her being there to hear her cry for justice. He could not eat his lunch in a restaurant without hearing her cries for help. And when he went home after a long day, there she was waiting for him in front of his house pleading her case. Finally he decides to judge her case and grant her justice against her adversary because he could not take it any longer. The Greek word used here for being worn out has the thought of being punched in the eye.

You see dear Christian, Jesus is such a good story teller. From this example of this persistent widow he encourages us to be persistent in our prayers. In contrast to this uncaring judge you have a heavenly Father who cannot wait for you to come to him in prayer. Jesus said in Matthew 7, "Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." Then he went on to say, "If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him." Like a pesky little fly you can keep coming back to your heavenly Father again and again and he loves every request you make to him and loves being bothered by your prayers.

The application

Now let's take a closer look at how Jesus applies this story to our lives. "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly."

Your heavenly Father dearly loves you, but he is also a God of justice. He cannot let people who are guilty get off the hook. He must demand that they be punished. This weekend there is a funeral in Palm Spring for two police officers who were gunned down by a man who was a known gang member who had committed multiple crimes but then was put back on the street. The man had eight children and was about to retire. The woman had just come back to work after giving birth to a baby. When we hear such stories of injustice in our land it causes the anger level to rise in all of us.

Our God is a God of justice. By his very nature as a holy and perfect God he must punish sin, not just some sin, but all sin. Romans 3 pulls from verses in the Old Testament to pronounce the whole human race guilty before God. "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes." This doesn't just speak about the violent criminals in our land or those involved in the 600 deaths this year in the city of Chicago. These words apply to all of us. They pronounce us guilty for the times we have been angry towards others and wanted to hurt them, not with actions, but bad words, and evil thoughts. It includes not showing love when we could or even praying for them as we should.

Our God is a God of justice. He is also a God of love who developed an amazing plan by which he satisfies his own system of justice and rescues us. He has a plan, an amazing plan, by which you can be pronounced not guilty instead of guilty. You know that plan and you know it well. But you never get tired of hearing about it. It's the gospel, the good news of what Jesus has done to spare you.

God's plan to satisfy his own justice was to place everything we ever did wrong on Jesus his Son. 2 Corinthians 5 says, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." Then it goes on to say, "But God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." In the hymn, "Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted" it says, "Many hands were raised to wound him, None would interpose to save, But the deepest stroke that pierced him Was the stroke that Justice gave." If you were to look up that hymn you would discover that the word "Justice" is capitalized, referring to our heavenly Father punishing Jesus in our place so we can be declared not guilty.

One of my favorite stories illustrating how God maintains his justice and but still saves us happened in New York City when La Guardia, the popular mayor, served as a judge. The story goes that a man was brought to his courtroom for stealing bread to feed his hungry children. He was obviously guilty, caught in the act and a policeman was there to testify to what he had seen. La Guardia said, "The law must be upheld. The punishment for stealing is 30 days in jail or a ten dollar fine." Then in compassion for the man and his hungry children, La Guardia reached into his pocket and provided the ten dollars to pay the fine. Your heavenly Father sent his Son into the world to pay for your sin. You are his own dear child through Jesus and he is eager to hear your prayers.

If your heavenly Father did all of his for you to satisfy his justice and also justify you, will he not hear all your prayers and answer them quickly as he determines is best for you? Jesus said, "I tell you that he will see that they get justice, and quickly."

You see how good your Lord Jesus is at telling stories. He shows us the example of the unfair judge who doesn't fear God and care about people as a striking contrast to your heavenly Father who can't wait for you to come to him in prayer this week. As we walk down the path of life this week, we need Jesus' story about prayer to remind us, "Keep praying! Keep praying! Keep praying!" When all the news about the election drives you almost to despair and maybe even anger. Then remember to pray for your country. "Keep praying! Keep praying! Keep praying!" When people you love start drifting away from Jesus, then remember, "Keep praying! Keep praying! Keep praying!" When you feel so weak and so inadequate and so far from being the salt of the earth and the light of the world, "Keep praying! Keep praying! Keep praying!" Jesus said, "I tell you that you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly." Keep praying! Amen.