

Sermon for September 28, 2025 – 16th Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 18:1-8 (EHV)

Theme: Pray

- 1) Persistently
- 2) Confidently

Jesus told them a parable about the need to always pray and not lose heart: ²“There was a judge in a certain town who did not fear God and did not care about people. ³There was a widow in that town, and she kept going to him, saying, ‘Give me justice from my adversary!’ ⁴For some time he refused, but after a while he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God or care about people, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice so that she will not wear me out with her endless pleading.’” ⁶The Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷Will not God give justice to his chosen ones, who are crying out to him day and night? Will he put off helping them? ⁸I tell you that he will give them justice quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

Have you ever prayed for something deeply — only to wonder if your prayers mattered at all? I once knew a woman whose husband was diagnosed with aggressive cancer. She prayed fervently for healing... but he died just months later. Through her tears, she asked me, “Pastor, was there something wrong with my prayers? I prayed, and I prayed, and it didn’t change anything.”

Maybe you’ve wondered the same thing. If our almighty God already knows and does what’s best, why bother praying? Can it really change anything?

Jesus addresses those very questions in today’s Gospel lesson. Through the parable of the persistent widow, He teaches us to **pray**:

- 1) ***persistently*** — without giving up,
- 2) and ***confidently*** — because the LORD reveals His heart to us.

Part One: Pray Persistently

Our sermon text follows a talk Jesus had with His disciples about the suddenness of His coming on the Last Day. Because of all the trials and temptations that threaten to entice us away from the Christian faith before His return, *Jesus told them a parable about the need to always pray and not lose heart.*

²“*There was a judge in a certain town who did not fear God and did not care about people.*”

This verse describes the worst-case scenario for a person seeking justice: having a judge with no moral compass, no fear of God, and no concern for others. Such a judge wields all the authority but uses it only for personal gain. How could anyone expect such a man to do what is right?

³*There was a widow in that town, and she kept going to him, saying, 'Give me justice from my adversary!'*

In that culture, widows were the picture of vulnerability. This widow had neither a husband to protect her, nor authority, nor influence. She couldn't bribe the judge, threaten him, or appeal to anyone else. All she had was her persistence and hope – demanding that the Judge do his duty. Therefore, she pleaded with him day after day: “Give me justice from my adversary!”

⁴*For some time he refused.*

Why? Because there was nothing in it for him. She was a nobody who could neither offer him money nor help his career. But after a while, the judge gave in, saying to himself:

'Even though I do not fear God or care about people, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice so that she will not wear me out with her endless pleading.'

What seemed impossible happened - all because of the widow's persistence in demanding that the judge fulfill his duty.

⁶*The Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says.*

Yes, listen to the judges' words and apply them to your relationship with God.

⁷*Will not God give justice to his chosen ones, who are crying out to him day and night? Will he put off helping them?*

If persistence can sway a man who cares nothing for God or people, how much more will persistence move the heart of the LORD who loves us?

Here is the contrast:

- The widow had **no promise** from the judge. We have God's **sure promises** in Christ.
- The judge acted only out of self-interest. Our God acts out of **self-giving love**.
- The widow was a stranger to the judge. We are God's **chosen and redeemed children** in Christ.

If a corrupt judge can be worn down by persistence, how much more will your heavenly Father delight to hear your prayers?

Jesus says:

⁸*I tell you that he will give them justice quickly.*

Why? Not because they have earned or deserved it, that's for sure, but for His mercy's sake – because He knows that we, like the widow, are powerless without Him.

Just think about the love God has for you: not only are you powerless, but you sinned against the Judge himself by breaking His holy law. He has every reason to throw you out of His court and into the eternal dungeon of hell reserved for the devil and his angels.

But He doesn't. Why? Because Jesus loves you – so much that He, the Judge of all, stepped into His Father's courtroom, stood in your place, and took upon Himself the punishment you deserved.

If God loved you so much that He would die for you when you were His enemy,ⁱ will He ignore you now that He has adopted you as His child through Holy Baptism?ⁱⁱ If He won for you the greatest gift imaginable—forgiveness of sins and life everlasting—when you didn't even ask for it, will He withhold the lesser gifts you ask for now that you turn to Him in repentant faith?ⁱⁱⁱ Of course not!

This, then, is why we pray persistently: not to change a reluctant judge's mind, but to entreat our heavenly Father, who has already proven His love through Jesus' cross and empty tomb!

So, let me ask you: do you pray persistently? I struggle. Why? Often because I'm afraid that God might not answer my prayer when or the way I want. And if He doesn't, I then struggle with thoughts like: "Did I do something wrong? Is God mad at me?" Worst of all, the devil tempts me to think: "Does God care? Is He even real?"

Part Two: Pray Confidently

All those questions reveal a faith that needs strengthening. And how is faith strengthened? The same way muscles are: by going through hardship.

It's easy to believe God's promises when everything goes your way. However, it's only in hardship, when it seems like God is not doing what he promised, that your confidence is truly tested. He allows such times in your life, not because He's mean, but to focus your attention on Jesus's cross and all His promises tied to it. It's there, and not in your life experiences, that you find the proof of God's love for you. It's there that you find the peace to keep calm and carry on with your persistent prayers: confident that He will work everything out for your everlasting good.^{iv}

Regarding the hardships God allows in your life, the apostle Peter wrote:

These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.^v

But what about Jesus' promise to be "quick" when giving us justice? Why does He delay answering the prayers Christians offered throughout the centuries to deliver His Church from this evil earth?

In answer to that question, the apostle Peter once wrote:

⁹The Lord is not slow to do what he promised, as some consider slowness. Instead, he is patient for your sakes, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance.^{vi}

Did you catch that? Jesus delays answering the prayers for His return for our sake, not wanting anyone to perish. But a time is coming when His patience will wear out, which is why Jesus asks:

However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Understand that Jesus' haunting question is not meant to insinuate that Christianity will be eradicated before Judgment Day. Jesus promises that *the gates of hell will not overpower [the church],^{vii}* and to be with us *always until the end of the age.*"

However, Jesus also says that, as the Last Day approaches:

Many will fall away from faith. They will betray each other and hate each other. ¹¹Many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹²Because lawlessness will increase, the love of many will grow cold... For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great signs and wonders so as to deceive even the elect, if it were possible.^{viii}

That is why Jesus encourages us *to always pray and not lose heart.* Prayer itself is an act of faith. It takes God at His Word and clings to His promises – telling Him, *"I will not let you go unless you bless me,"^{ix}* even though our feelings are telling us to let go.

The LORD loves such persistent prayers. For Jesus' sake, He credits the saving faith they express to us as righteousness^x and promises to give us what we ask in accordance with His will.

But what about the woman I mentioned at the beginning of our sermon, whose husband died of cancer? Why didn't Jesus give her what she asked?

To answer that question, I want you to recall Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. As our perfect substitute, He prayed with more persistence and confidence than anyone in history. *"Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."^{xi}*

And what was His Father's answer? It wasn't deliverance *from* the suffering. It was a strength *to endure* the suffering. Why? Because the Father knew that Jesus' path through the cross would not only end in our salvation but also in His Son's glory.

Understand, then, that when God does not answer your prayers by changing your circumstances, He is nevertheless present to help you face them – just as He was with Jesus. Sometimes, He withholds what you want in the moment to give you what you truly need for life everlasting.

And in those moments, when it seems as if God is going to answer your prayers differently than you desire, God doesn't want you to stop asking, but to keep praying, albeit with the trusting surrender: "Not my will, but Yours, be done." Why? Because His will, even when it seems

painful and strange, is always guided by a love that is deeper and a wisdom that is higher than we could ever fathom – working in all things for the good of those who love Him.^{xii}

Therefore, dear Christian, don't lose heart. Keep on praying for your wayward child to return to faith, or for your parent who is suffering from Alzheimer's disease to be healed. Keep asking God to remove your cancer or help you get the job you want and secure a place to live. In everything, keep knocking on heaven's door, trusting that God hears and will answer you for Jesus' sake.

Why? Because, with all your persistent pleading, you are not bothering a reluctant judge. You are speaking to your heavenly Father, who loves you, chose you, died for you, and rose again. He is planning how best to bless you through His answer, even before your request forms on your lips.^{xiii} In most cases, He will grant the very things you ask! But even if He doesn't, you can be confident that whatever the LORD does will be for your everlasting good.

Therefore, keep on praying persistently and confidently. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. Romans 5:10

ⁱⁱ Cf Galatians 3:26-37

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Romans 8:32

^{iv} Cf. Romans 8:28

^v 1 Peter 1:7 EHV

^{vi} 2 Peter 3:9 EHV

^{vii} Matthew 16:18 EHV

^{viii} Matthew 24:10-12, 24 EHV

^{ix} Genesis 32:36 EHV

^x Cf. Romans 4:20-25

^{xi} Mark 14:36 EHV

^{xii} Cf. Romans 8:28

^{xiii} Cf. Psalm 139:4