

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost - Year C
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Genesis 32:22-31
Psalm 121
II Timothy 3:14—4:5
Luke 18:1-8
10/16/2022

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

1Then 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 opponent.' 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?"
The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Persistence

Good morning! They're a blight on the earth. They cause problems across the world, spreading disease and killing untold numbers of people. They are, without a doubt, the most deadly animal in the whole world... I'm talking of course about mosquitos. Those tiny little insects that buzz around causing only itching and heartache. Did you know that they're responsible for over a million deaths a year? They can drink three times their weight in blood. While they're a significant health concern for much of the world, here in North America they're mostly a pest. But you need to know that it's personal for me. I once left a week at Camp Luther in Cowen, WV with 68 individual bug bites. Those tiny little jerks... They're a perfect example for today's Gospel lesson on persistence. Because they illustrate perfectly that something tiny can indeed have a large effect. All the trouble they cause and they can't even fly faster than 2 mph!¹

Our story today is unique in that Jesus tells us the whole point of the parable right in the beginning: *"Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart."* And yet, I had a really tough time with the text this week. Figures, the answer is right in front of me, and yet I kept struggling. I resisted the urge to rush right to a commentary or scholarly work for help. There's something especially satisfying when you arrive at the same conclusion or insight as a specialist, and so I spent a good deal of time wrestling with the text and where I felt we should go.

It's a relatively straightforward story, but some background may help us see a little more deeply. The first thing to do is take a look back at where we just were. After the healing of the 10 lepers in last week's text Jesus speaks to his disciples. He tells them of the coming of the Kingdom of God,

¹ <https://www.westernexterator.com/blog/10-interesting-facts-mosquitoes/>

reminding them that it will come suddenly and without warning. He also predicts that he will suffer, that he will be rejected. After this, the disciples are noticeably shaken, and so Jesus gives them some encouragement with our story today. “Take heart!” Jesus seems to be saying.

In our story we learn of a corrupt judge who *“neither feared God nor had respect for people.”* Clearly, a class act. It seems that a certain widow refused to be ignored and so continually bothered the judge. Just because this woman is a widow does not mean that she was older. It was not uncommon for older men to have much younger wives. But in the first century widows were especially vulnerable. Any protection they received was essentially at the charity of another. In fact, widows were part of a group that God and the Hebrew Scriptures specifically name as people to protect. The poor, the widow, the orphan, and the alien. Deuteronomy 10:17-18 says that God is one who *“**18** who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. **19** You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”* Given the tone of the story, it seems clear that the case the widow is bringing before the corrupt judge is one financially focused, most likely settlement for the estate in which she had been duped. Her determination is eventually rewarded, and the judge gives in.

Which brings us back to my comment on scholarly work. I wracked my brain on where to go this week, and then I read the opening paragraph from Francisco J. Garcia and felt like a blind idiot. He writes: *“As someone who has been an activist and organizer for many years and has sought to ground this work prayerfully as a follower of Jesus, I absolutely love this parable. It speaks to the divinely rooted call to pursue justice, while also grounding it in the context of living a faithful life. It urges us to resist the*

tendency to think about prayer in a simplified and uni-directional way, as merely words we offer to God in a transactional and hierarchical manner (in other words, the idea of praying to God the ‘Father’ up in the sky). It also makes a clear, intimate, and inseparable connection, in my view, between prayer and justice. This parable invites preachers and all who would receive it to think of prayer as an active, dynamic, relational, and even mystical enterprise between us and God.”²

It’s a story of the widow’s ACTION! Literally her working towards a just result. I kept thinking of the story as an allegory for sitting quietly in a room with my eyes closed praying for a specific outcome. But no! Jesus is telling the disciples to keep at it! Don’t lose hope and keep working!

Prayer can take on many different forms. And so I want to take this chance to hear from you. I’m going to hand out a form that I want to hang up with some ideas from the congregation on ways that prayer can be action. After a few minutes, I’ll pray.

Amen.

²<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-29-3/commentary-on-luke-181-8-5>