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# Persistence in Prayer

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 19 October 2025

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 • Luke 18:1-8

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May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

We have another interesting parable this week from Luke's Gospel. It concerns a judge who has no interest in justice. He wants to get through life as easily as possible, not lifting a finger to help anyone who comes before him. He freely admits that he does not fear God or respect anyone. He is the worst excuse for a judge you could think of.

Then we have a woman, who has been pestering him for justice. We don't know what the issue is; perhaps she has a property dispute with her neighbour; perhaps she is owed money by someone. Whatever it is, she wants what is due to her, and the only person who can give it to her is this terrible judge. So she pesters him night and day, demanding that he grant her justice.

We talked in my last sermon about what we owe to God. I suggested the easy answer is that we owe God our lives, which is true; but truly what we owe is found in our attitude to God: most of all, we owe him obedience. We owe him obedience because he created us and gives us everything we have. We should give our obedience gladly, since he loves us totally and completely.

Where does our obedience show itself? In following Christ, and a big part of following Christ is to have a strong and robust prayer life. God wants our obedience, yes; and he wants us to show it through our attention to his voice and will. We learn his will through prayer, and we show our faith by obedience to his will. God loves us as we are, as he created us; but in love for God we strive to make ourselves better followers of Christ.

So Jesus talks a lot about prayer, and that is what this parable is about. The woman's pleading with this ridiculous judge is meant to suggest our prayer to God. We bring our petitions to God and pray that God will hear us and answer us. Unlike the judge, God does not get tired of us if we come to him every day, or every hour, or every minute. God wants us to pray constantly, as Paul suggests — remembering also to give thanks in all things, because all that comes from God is a gift. We should be like the persistent woman — persistent in prayer.

Don't confuse God and the judge! Since we see ourselves in the role of the persistent woman, it is tempting to assign God the role of the unjust judge. God is not unjust. Jesus often used this way of speaking, arguing from the lesser to the greater. The lesser in this case is the judge; the greater is of course God. What Jesus is saying is this: if even this judge, who hates everyone, will eventually grant someone's persistent requests, then even more will God, who loves us, grant our requests! If the unjust judge grants requests, then the just God will certainly do so. Jesus says, "I tell you, [God] will quickly grant justice" (Luke 18:8). So be persistent — again, pray constantly. God will not tire of listening to his children. And the power of prayer is multiplied by many people praying together for the same thing. That is the idea behind the prayers we do together here in church.

I pray every day that God will send us his people to grow our parish. I pray that he will turn the hearts of even a few more of his people to be open to the teaching which we can give them right here, and the example we can show them, right here in their church, of how true Christians act towards each other. Gracious God, send us your people that we may teach them about you! That is a simple prayer which each of us could pray every day. God will hear our prayers, and when the time is right, he will act.

Paul talks in our first reading about another occasion for persistence. He says to be persistent in proclaiming the message. Since, as we know, many people are not open to the Gospel message today, we must pray that their hearts will be opened. God, for his own reasons, does not always open their hearts, and it is only when that happens that we have a chance of teaching them the Gospel. But God does intend eventually to call everyone to him, and so it is important that

we keep talking about the Gospel with everyone we can; so that when they are called, we may do our part.

And God does work in our hearts. I know many people — some who are in this parish — who have come to God late in life, or have returned to worship after decades away. Why would this happen, except that God chooses different times to call each of his children? I was 46 when I was called. I like to joke that maybe God called me earlier and I just wasn't paying attention; but couldn't God make me pay attention any time he wants to? No, it just wasn't God's plan to call me any earlier. So at the right time, God worked in my heart and made me ready to be called.

In a greater sense, God orders the times of our lives right the way through. God made my wife Melissa a cradle Lutheran; he made me a cradle — nothing. Just a happy baby boy, well-loved and well-cared for, but with no immediate prospect of knowing God. That was being saved for later — and God caused Melissa and me to meet, which eventually had a part in bringing me here, where I am today. For that I am thankful.

There are many things we can pray for. I think it's best to choose only two or three things to focus on in your prayer time, over the course of a week or several weeks. Don't worry about repeating yourself. Jesus gives us permission in this Gospel reading to be persistent in prayer. Let us act as Jesus teaches us to do, and pray that God will act in mercy for his people, and to his own greater glory. Amen.