

Pentecost 22 10/16/16
St. Luke 18:1-8 24C

“AND HE TOLD THEM A PARABLE TO THE EFFECT THAT THEY OUGHT ALWAYS TO PRAY AND NOT LOSE HEART”.

At the height of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln once said, “I have often been driven to my knees by the realization that I have nowhere else to go.” Abraham Lincoln learned the lesson Jesus is teaching us in the example of persistent widow in our parable this morning.

That’s what our parable is all about this Sunday. Persistence. JESUS IS TEACHING US THAT WE ARE TO PRAY ALWAYS AND NOT LOSE HEART, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT SEEMS TO OUR HUMAN REASON THAT GOD IS NOT LISTENING TO OUR PRAYERS AND NOT ANSWERING THEM. Faith clings to God and holds Him to the promises in His Word.

I. God commands and invites all believers in Jesus Christ to pray with the promise that He will hear us. Yet, honestly, that is easier said than done.

In the weakness of our human nature, we treat God like a magic-genie who serves us at our beckon and command. We get sick, have money problems, our kids become a handful, just pull the magic lamp off the shelf, rub it, and God the magic-genie is supposed to appear and do for us as we wish. But, what happens when God doesn’t work the way we think He should or want Him to? Like a two-year-old having a temper tantrum, we get a case of the “if you don’t play by my rules, I’ll take my ball and go home.” We naval gaze, feel sorry for ourselves, get angry at God and -- stop praying.

Then, who wins? Satan! The father of all lies succeeds in driving a

wedge between God and us.

That's why Jesus told us the parable in our lesson this morning – to teach us to pray with bold persistence. In the parable, humanly speaking, this poor, old widow didn't stand a chance of gaining justice against her adversary. She was poor; she couldn't afford big legal fees; she couldn't bribe the judge. And this judge "neither feared God nor respected man". We can barely even imagine what a hard-hearted, cynical scoundrel he was. Humanly speaking, to quote the old proverb, her chances were slim and none and slim was packing his bags to leave town. Yet, she persisted, day after day, and finally, just to get her off his back, the unjust judge took up her case and granted her the justice she sought.

Jesus, in the parable, said in effect, that if this widow was finally granted her request under such seemingly hopeless circumstances, God, your merciful, kind, wise Heavenly Father, will have mercy and hear your prayer for His sake.

II. God will have mercy and hear your prayer because of Persistence. Not your persistence, but the persistence of Jesus who went to the cross and reconciled us to God. The Evangelist Luke, "He set His face to go to Jerusalem" (Lk 9:51). Nothing could keep Jesus from Jerusalem and the death of the cross that awaited Him there.

Even as an infant child, He had to flee to Egypt to escape King Herod. The father of all lies tempted Him in the wilderness to serve Himself and seek His own glory to keep Him from the cross. His own brothers and sisters thought He was crazy. The crowd picked up stones to stone Him. Even His own disciples didn't understand the cross. He asked them, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" Peter correctly confessed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then, Jesus told them "He must go

to Jerusalem and suffer many things...and be killed, and on the third day be raised up” (Mt 16). And Peter tried to keep Him from the cross, “This shall never happen to you.” He wrestled with the weakness of His own mortal flesh in Gethsemane’s Garden to the point of sweating drops of blood.

Nothing could keep Jesus from the cross! Nailed to that wooden rod of torture, He cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?” Martin Luther calls these words the strongest confession of faith in all the Scripture. Even in the hour of death, Jesus knew His Father was in control; He was dying in accordance with His Father’s good and gracious will.

Because of Jesus’ persistence in going to the cross to reconcile us to God, our sin is gone in His blood, we are forgiven, our sin no longer separates us from our Father in Heaven, so we can go boldly to God’s throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.

III. In the Christian faith and life, we pray for the simple reason that God has commanded us to pray and has promised to hear us. “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you,” your Father in heaven says (Ps 50:15). Peter directs us, “[Cast] all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you” (1 Pt 5:7). Jesus teaches us that we are to play always and not lose heart.

The dark days and the long nights of the Civil War made Abraham Lincoln see that he had no place to go but to his knees in prayer. The hymnwriter of old taught us the importance of struggling with God in prayer:

“Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged – Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Like Jacob in our Old Testament lesson. Years before, Jacob had

cheated his brother Esau. He had fled in fear of his life. Now, 20 years later, he was returning to his brother. And, he feared -- he feared that now his brother would exact his revenge upon him and his family. Alone, he struggled with God. This was a physical wrestling match; but much more, it was a spiritual struggle. Yes, most certainly, God, the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth, could have returned Jacob to the dust from which he came any time he wanted. But, God did not want that. He wanted Jacob to struggle, to wrestle with his doubts and fears. God did not want Jacob to be timid. God wanted Jacob to cling to Him in faith with boldness!

So it is that in our times of trouble, God wants us to call upon Him in prayer with boldness. God does not want us to be timid; God wants us to struggle so that our faith will overcome our doubts and fears.

Jacob, after wrestling with God all night, had his hip put out of joint so that he would walk with a limp for the rest of his earthly life. That limp, with every step, reminded him on his dependence upon God.

In our Christian faith and life, we do not walk by human reason and intelligence, nor by feelings and emotions. We walk by faith -- faith which trusts the promises of God to hear our prayers. In the midst of things we cannot understand; when God seems deaf to our cries for deliverance, then we must all the more boldly cling to God in faith, because we are dependent upon Him.

Like Jacob we wrestle in faith with God -- under the cross, in the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death. We hold God to the promises of His Word: "I will never leave you nor forsake you ... I am with you always ... All things work together for good ... My grace is sufficient for you ... The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom". Faith always hopes, always trusts, always

clings to God's own promise that God hears our prayers and delivers is in the way and at the time He knows best.

Peter Marshall, the late Chaplain of the US Senate, once said in a prayer, "O Lord, forgive us for thinking that prayer is a waste of time, and help us to see that without prayer our work is a waste of time." It's true; there's really nothing we can do that is more important and significant than to pray. So, let us remember the words of our Gospel. Jesus tells us this parable so that we never lose heart, be discouraged and disheartened and cease to pray, but that we pray always, commending our bodies and souls in our Father's hand.