

Persevering in Prayer

19th Sun. after Pentecost – 10/19/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Luke 18:1-8 Pastor Keith Besel

Introduction

- ✧ When Luke recorded today's text, he gave you and me as his readers an advantage that His disciples, who actually heard Jesus that day, did not have. He tells us in verse one, "[Jesus] told them" – that is the disciples with Him, "a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart."
 - ➔ Parables can often be puzzling, tricky to figure out; often just down right hard to understand. They can catch the reader off guard because of the way that they start out with something familiar to us; something that most of us have experienced ourselves, but then suddenly things change.
 - ➔ Often from one word to the next the parable takes that earthly experience that we all understand and flips the focus onto God; onto the far deeper, heavenly meaning that Jesus really wants for us to learn.
- ✧ And this parable from Jesus today does just that. But to be honest, Luke felt that we still might miss God's intended meaning if he didn't clue us in on Jesus' intention from the start.
 - ➔ So, while Luke says that persevering in prayer is the primary meaning of this parable, he assumes that we also know the topic that Jesus is currently teaching His disciples about. He's teaching them about The Day of His final return at the end of time. That's the topic; the end goal of the persistent prayer that Luke says Jesus is wanting His followers to be about until He comes again.

I. My personal experience

- ✧ So let's follow the pattern that Jesus uses in this parable to most effectively get at what He wants us to understand and be about today and in the days to come.
- ✧ An earthly example we can understand. We all have our own stories of perseverance. One that I remember from my younger years, was a one-day ski trip that I took with a friend. Neither of us owned our own equipment so we rented our skis and boots down here the night before, then went up early in the morning in order to get the most out of the "outrageous" \$20 one-day lift ticket-price that Copper Mountain charged in 1981.
 - ➔ I wasn't skiing very long on the slopes that day before I realized that my boots were fitting a little too tight. But there was no way that I was going to waste my hard-earned \$20, plus the cost of the rental and gas. So I just sucked it up and kept going. By mid-day, my two big toes were starting to hurt pretty bad. Still, I grinned and fought through the pain. As the 3:00pm closing time approached, every run was excruciating, but would I quit? No way! I wasn't going to let my friend down, or "waste my money". At the end I limped to the car and drove down the mountain (with very little traffic, by the way) with just my socks on.
 - ➔ That night both toe nails started turning black and within a week or so, I began to lose both of them.
- ✧ Was that perseverance and pain worth it? Both then, and still today, my answer is, "Absolutely!" The fun we had, as well as the lesson I learned, about not giving up just because something is hard and uncomfortable, was all worth it.

II. Our story of perseverance

- ✘ Well, that's my story; one that may seem silly or even idiotic to many of you. But we all have our own stories like that; moments in our lives when, as children, or later on, we learned the value and importance of persevering in the face of adversity, pain or misfortune. Think for a moment of a time that you learned how to persevere.
 - ➔ And now as you have grown older and the trials of life have come your way, what has your experience taught you? What have you learned about God and His relationship with you as His child?
- ✘ The doctor says he/she found a mass or a lump. Your daughter is unable to conceive. You now have to navigate the loneliness after your spouse has died.
 - ➔ What once was as easy as child's play to do, is now a daily struggle of pain or a significant risk that you might fall or a question of how much longer your time on this earth might be.
 - ➔ It's easy for us all to lose heart. But, instead you turn to God in prayer and in faith and you set it all before Him. As David set the example for us in Psalm 55:22, "Cast your burden on Yahweh, and He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be moved."
- ✘ Still though, it's hard sometimes not to wonder how long we can continue to do this. Will we be able to persevere to the end? When will God intervene to stop the pain? When will He step in and make things "right"?

III. God reorients our understanding

- ✘ For those of us who have ever asked those questions or been in such a situation, you know what a blessing it is to listen to our Gospel reading today.
 - ➔ Because here in His parable, Jesus has an important word for you. According to Luke, Jesus apparently sees that His disciples are in a similar spot; they're about to lose heart. As hard as discipleship has been for them, He knows that it's about to get much harder.
 - ➔ Jesus has begun to predict His own crucifixion, but in chapter nine we learn that the disciples "did not understand" what He was saying (9:22, 44–45). They've seen the religious leaders challenge Jesus' teaching and authority. And in Luke 17:4-5, Jesus has even called His followers to exercise what sounds like unending forgiveness, saying, "if [your brother] sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him." This is so radical to the apostles that they reply to Jesus, "Increase our faith!"
- ✘ That's why Jesus now pauses here in this text to tell them a parable. As we initially listen to the parable, the widow's situation is the one that we all can easily understand and relate to.
 - ➔ Perhaps we, like her, have struggled with injustice; have fought to have a voice; have been denied a seat at the table. So we understand what it's like to be overlooked. At first we might be tempted to think that Jesus is giving us an example of a woman who had nothing, but used all she had to persevere and keep on fighting for justice.
 - ➔ In fact, I suspect many of us have thought before that this parable is all about Jesus telling us, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again" – even when it comes to your prayers to God. But that would be an incorrect interpretation, according to the words here in this text.
- ✘ Notice, instead how Jesus doesn't actually ask us ever to focus on the widow, does he? Even though you and I might be interested in her situation, that's not where Jesus takes us; He gives us nothing about a some secret for how she found the strength to carry on beyond that day.
 - ➔ Instead, Jesus tells us in verse six where He wants us to focus our attention. He explicitly says, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says."

➔ Now, why on earth would He want us to listen to the judge? The judge is arrogant. In verse four he says that he doesn't even care about God or about people. This guy is selfish and the only reason he grants the widow justice is to keep her from bothering him anymore. So, what is Jesus getting at? What good could you and I get from listening to an unrighteous, arrogant, selfish person?

✘ Actually, quite a lot. You see, the point of comparison between God and the judge is not their unrighteousness, but instead it is the character trait that motivates both the judge and God to vindicate someone who has endured wrong.

➔ Jesus is making what's called a lesser-to-greater argument. He knows that the judge is about the worst person you could encounter. So He wants you to know that if you get justice when you come before an unrighteous judge like that, imagine what will happen when you come before a righteous judge like God, the Father.

➔ Even the unrighteous judge, though he didn't care about others, he did finally care about his reputation. So, Jesus wants us to look at the unrighteous judge and his flawed character so that we will treasure all the more fully the righteous and perfect character of God who is our judge.

➔ God will always be true to Himself and His Word. He truly cares about people and He always desires to bring about justice. Not only does He invite people to pray, but He promises to listen to their prayers. And Jesus knows that what motivates us to pray is not a command that we should do so; not some warped understanding that the more we pray the more God will let us have our way. No, it is instead our gratitude because God loves us so much that He has brought us into His kingdom; into His family of faith where we know without a doubt that He hears our prayers and answers them according to what He knows is perfectly just and right.

✘ The unrighteous judge was selfish. He didn't want to lose face because of the widow's constant complaining. But Jesus is selfless. He not only wants to bear our burdens, but He is willing to bear the public shame of the cross in order to carry our sins to the grave and rise in victory over any and all suffering that seeks to drag us down. In this way – in Jesus, God has shown Himself to be the only true, loving and faithful Judge; who forgives your sin and offers you eternal life in His kingdom.

➔ While the unrighteous judge thought only of himself, our righteous Judge gave Himself up to save and vindicate His people. Knowing this; and seeing it in Jesus then, what burden could ever come our way that He cannot overcome or endure or make right in the end? What prayer could ever be too great for Him to hear?

IV. God applies the lesson to us.

✘ So, how does God's intended lesson in this parable apply to you and to me directly today; to all of us as His people here in His one Holy Christian Church?

➔ This truth of God's character; His perfect love and care for us as the only truly righteous judge ... it strengthens us every day to come to Him with any and all of the burdens that we face in life.

➔ After all, He's the one who brings us into His kingdom in Baptism and gifts us there with His Holy Spirit to guide us through any and every challenge or opposition that we may face.

✘ So Jesus calls us through this parable; He encourages us – just as He did His disciples, never to lose heart. Even if you have a prayer request that you are tempted to give up on; if you have a burden that you are tired of carrying; if you have a battle that you are growing weary of fighting, don't give up!

➔ Jesus died; Jesus rose in victory over all things so that you and I can be assured that in the end; when He returns to bring about the new creation on the Last Day, His righteous judgement will win the day for you and all believers into eternity.

➔ He holds the entire world in His hands, and He is working all things together for your good, for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). In fact, according to His timing and His perfect understanding of all things, you and I can truly believe as Jesus said in verses 7-8, that God's justice will not be delayed any more than He knows is right and is for our good. No, "He will give justice...speedily" when Jesus, "the Son of Man comes."

Conclusion

✕ In the meantime; while we wait, He has sent us His Spirit to be with us. He has also called us here into the community of His Church so that, as Paul says in his letters to us New Testament Christians, we can "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2), "encourage the fainthearted (and) help the weak" (1 Thess. 5:14), and "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might" (Eph. 6:10).

➔ Still Jesus asks the real question in this parable, not about God, but about us at the end of verse eight. God will always be faithful, but, "When the Son of Man comes," Jesus asks, "will He find faith on earth?" It's a legitimate question to ask of us sinners. He knows we face Satan's tempting every day to give up and to give in to difficulty. So, will we persevere? Will He find faith among His Children here on earth?

➔ As long as we live each day in His grace; taking everything to the Lord in prayer; remaining in His Word and Sacrament gifts as He has given them to us for guidance and strength, we can boldly and confidently say, "Yes, by the grace of God!" To Him be the glory today and always. Amen.