

Luke 18: 1-8

Always pray. Don't lose heart.

That is the message today.

To lose heart is to give up, to be exasperated by difficulty, defeated in spirit, discouraged, faint-hearted, to be in despair. We might lose heart when we pray for what we desperately need or hope for and nothing happens. We see no change.

We might be tempted to lose heart when do not get the job we are praying for.

-when we cannot win the battle of our addiction

-when we are worried about the salvation of our children, loved ones, or enemies

-when we pray for peace in the Middle East

-when we pray the Lord's Prayer, 'your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven', and we just don't see anything happen.

If you have ever felt like your prayers evaporate into thin air, or bounce back off the ceiling, this parable is for you. There is a character here for you to remember when you pray.

She is a little old widow lady, tough as a boot and as determined as a pit-bull. She does not know the world 'quit'.

In Jesus' day widows were as vulnerable as a candle in the wind.

They could not inherit property from their husband. There was no organized social welfare program and the jobs for widows were pretty limited. (Boring and Craddock)

The widow in Jesus' parable has all that and one more thing. There is someone who is coming after her, taking what little she has.

She goes to the judge. The judge was the court of last resort, the settler of claims and disputes. All she is asking for is what is fair and the judge has the power to give it to her.

But this is a bad judge. He has no respect for God and no compassion for people. I can't help but wonder if maybe his wife's cousin is married to the guy who is harassing the widow.

He turns the widow down. "Don't bother me lady."

And that is where most such stories end. One more widow goes away to suffer her lot in life.

But she comes back. At first the judge does not recognize or remember her. He does not remember her case. He sends her away again.

She comes back.

She interrupts his morning nap.

As he is working on his short game, focussing on keeping his head down, his secretary says, 'she's back!'

Then, during his back swing at the tee on seven he hears that familiar, annoying voice, "Excuse me, sir!"

When he comes out of the restaurant with his wife, she's waiting, "Excuse me, but I was wondering if you have an answer for me yet?"

She's back, again, and again, and again and again!

Finally, out of his own self-interest... "I will give her what she wants because she is going to wear me out!" Out of **his own self-interest** he gives her the legal protection she is asking for.

Remember the stubborn, persistent widow. Remember the widow who did not care what the judge thought of her, who did not know how to give up.... Let her example inspire you to keep on praying even when you feel like losing heart.

Even the most callous and uncaring judge in the world eventually gives in.

Now consider God. God who is full of loving-kindness, who is faithful to all he has made, who is passionate for justice... will God answer the prayers of his people who cry out to him day and night?

Of course he will!

He will answer the prayers of his people and he will do it right away. He will answer the prayers of his people for justice, and he will do it quickly.

There is an irony built right into this parable and the need for it. Remember, Luke tells us that Jesus told this parable so that we will not lose heart. But if all of our prayers

were answered quickly, we would not lose heart. The struggle about losing heart is totally the struggle we have because it does not seem like God always hears or answers with anything we might call 'quickly'.

Some people offer answers to the problem of God's 'delay'. Is part of prayer God's work on us? That is, as we pray are we being shaped and prepared and matured so that we are able to hold the answer or the blessing when it comes? I know that when I have had to wait a long time for an answer, sometimes I have even forgotten I prayed the prayer, it is very humbling. Would 'quick' answers to prayer make us proud?

Fred Craddock writes...."We do not know. All we know in the life of prayer is asking, seeking, knocking, and waiting, trust sometimes fainting, sometimes growing angry. Persons of such a prayer life can only wonder at those who speak of prayer with the smiling facility of someone drawing answers from a hat. In a large gathering of persons concerned about certain unfair and oppressive conditions in our society, an elderly black minister read this parable and gave a one-sentence interpretation: "Until you have stood for years knocking at a locked door, your knuckles bleeding, you do not really know what prayer is." His and our encouragement comes not only in this parable but also in Jesus' own prayer life. Luke says Jesus sometimes prayed all night (6:12), and some ancient texts say of his praying on the night of his arrest: "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (22:44).

Always pray. Do not lose heart. Remember the widow.

There are questions the parable answers:

Does God hear? Yes.

Does God care? Yes.

Will God act? Yes.

And there is a question the parable gives us.

We live on earth. We live in the realm of mankind. It is a broken place, a confused place and a violent place. It is a place where many of Jesus' followers cry out for justice from their oppressors. We are often weak, or fearful. We have deep tendencies to want to make change happen, or to give our problems to God and then take them back again. Here on earth there are temptations for us to give up on God altogether.

As we live on earth, the parable gives us this question:

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

When the Son of Man, the deepest answer to all our prayers, comes, will he find us trusting, praying, counting on him? Will he find a community of people crying out to him, a community of parents who teach their children to pray?

The Lord be gracious to you. The Lord be gracious to me. And all God's people said, Amen.