

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 19, 2025
St. Michaels Church
By The Rev. Joshua Wong

Today's Gospel: Luke 18:1-8

Let us pray:

I will lift up my eyes to the mountains;
From where shall my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
Who made heaven and earth. *Amen.*

Today, Jesus clearly tells his disciples a parable about their need to pray always and not lose heart. There's no mysterious meaning behind this parable; its meaning is straightforward, that despite our feelings of fighting a losing battle, of supporting a losing cause, don't give up. Keep praying. The people of Israel and their neighbors endured disappointment after disappointment throughout their history. They know what hardship and injustice felt like. So when Jesus' speaks about not losing hope, they know what that means.

Are there prayers in your life that you might feel like God is not listening to you?
Are you afraid of how the world is today, for gun control, for your health care, finances, your family and friends? Jesus says don't lose heart, keep praying.

In the United States, yesterday was No Kings Day II, a nationwide nonviolent protest against authoritarianism to reclaim this country's founding belief in democracy and the rights of the people. The lectionary passage for today seems ripped from the headlines. Think about how the widow must have felt facing down an unjust justice system. We all need to be like her now. The parable describes a judge who "neither feared God nor had respect for people." Rarely has a biblical story spoken so directly to what is happening on the streets causing many of us to feel hopeless and discouraged by what is happening in our world today.

In this week's Gospel, Jesus tells a parable about a widow who seeks justice against her oppressor. Day after day, she appeals to a judge, "who neither fears God nor has respect for people." The responsibility of judges during Biblical times was to settle disputes fairly and to restore justice. The weaker members of the community were dependent on them, yet, day after day, this judge refuses to help her. Widows in Israelite tradition were extremely vulnerable, they could not inherit their husband's property, there was no organized welfare program and for the most part no opportunity for independent employment for them. They were often dependent on the judge for protection and fairness, since they were easily

victimized. In this story, the judge is the woman's only hope for justice, and he is a bad judge. But she persists, tirelessly bothering the judge until he's sick of her very presence: "I will grant her justice," he says to himself, "so that she may not wear me out." Here is the surprising element in the parable, even the bad judge does the unexpected thing in response to a powerless widow, and grants justice.

At the outset, the Gospel writer tells us that Jesus's parable is about "the need to pray always and not lose heart." But this is troubling. Are we really supposed to harass God until we wear him down? Is that what prayer is — bothering a hardhearted God until he caves? When I receive an answer to prayer, is it only because God is sick to death of hearing my voice, and wants me to go away?

Thankfully, the reading anticipates these questions, and wards them off. Jesus explains that the parable works by way of contrast: The fact is that Jesus is the opposite of the judge. If an unjust judge responds, not on the basis of justice and compassion, but merely because of persistence, how much more will the just and loving God respond to those who appeal to him for vindication. *Unlike* the heartless judge in the story, God instead "will quickly grant justice" to those who cry out to him. Commentators have noted that in the context, the word "quickly"

here is not a matter of chronology, but means God will not hesitate to vindicate those who call on him.

But this explanation raises another troubling question, because our lived experiences may be otherwise. Too often, God does delay, and our most fervent prayers, seem to have gone unanswered. Too often, our struggles with prayer lead us to experience God very much as the judge, who turned away from the urgency of our requests for reasons we can't begin to understand.

But what can we learn if we put ourselves in the place of the widow? First of all, not to lose heart. When we lose heart, we lose clarity, and begin to doubt God's intentions. But in contrast, the widow is an example of someone with purpose, and clarity. She knows her goals, she knows its urgency, and knows it takes effort to persist. Everyday, she gets up, gets dressed, and she heads over to the judge's house, banging on his door, and talking his ear off until he listens.

Why does Jesus ask us to pray always? Because when we pray with persistence, like the widow, something happens to us. Prayer fortifies our own sense of who

we are and to whom we belong, even when we don't receive the answer we're praying for.

I don't mean for a moment to suggest that unanswered prayer doesn't take a toll on us. It does. It hurts and it baffles. Sometimes it breaks our hearts. But maybe that's the point of the parable, too: the work of prayer is hard. The widow's predicament is not straightforward; she has to make a costly choice every single day. Will I keep asking? Am I still capable of trusting in the possibility of justice?

Prayer is a great mystery. We can't know why some prayers are answered and others are not. We can't understand why our earnest pleas for justice, or healing, hit the wall of God's silence and sometimes remain there for weeks, or a lifetime. But we know that God has promised vindication for those who call on him.

And yet, from the heart of this bewildering mystery, Jesus asks, "Will I find faith on the earth?" Which is to say, will I find men and women like the bothersome widow with tenacity and fortitude? The widow's only power in this story is the

power of showing up. Persistent prayer is not to be taken lightly. We can't always know what happens to our prayer. Now or after we are no longer here.

In our present time, it's so easy to lose heart. We live in a time that requires clear vision. Without it, we are vulnerable to the forces that threaten us with fear and all sorts of spiritual malady. Paul's letter today to Timothy says, "For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully." Today's lesson of not giving up, be persistent in seeking God's will in prayer prepares us for such a time. Our vision is focused on Jesus who understands injustice and the pains of humanity. Our vision is on prayer and faith, that in due time, God's mercy shall overcome all injustice and fear, and we are reminded that we are not powerless.

Jesus says, "Pray always and not to lose heart." It is important to always approach prayer with an openness to God's will, and not our own. While Jesus was still on earth, he leaves his disciples with an example of prayer which is found in The Lord's Prayer. The Lord's prayer centers on God's kingdom, God's will, God's

reminder of what is truly important, such as love and forgiveness, and reminds us that God ultimately holds the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever. So, don't lose heart, pray always and know that unlike the bad judge, God is quick to grant justice to us. Amen.